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## **A Drop in the Bucket: Transnational Philanthropy for Development Work in India by the Indian American Community**

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## ABSTRACT

The role that diasporas play in development has received focus from academic scholars, policy planners, and politicians in developing countries, especially within the context of globalization and cross-border flows of human capital. India has drawn a lot of attention for these issues because of the migration of highly skilled, highly educated migrants. This dissertation focuses on the work of volunteers and philanthropic voluntary organizations in the Indian American community supporting development-related issues in India. Additionally, because of the unique landscape of Indian American organizations, I will also look at differences between religious and secular organizations. This dissertation answers the following questions:

- How do the secular or religious dynamics at play in India and the diaspora shape ideologies of development espoused by these organizations? How does this reflect the politics at home and abroad?
- How do individuals in these organizations understand their work in the organization and its relation to development and social issues in the homeland?
- Given the unique character of these organizations, as compared to other ethnic organizations, what is the particular space for belonging that is created in these organizations? And how are members socialized to the functions of a non-profit organization?

Using a Grounded Theory framework, this study utilizes multiple data sources, incorporating evidence from interviews, archival and online-based documents for the organizations, emails on organizational listservs, and participant-observation at organizational meetings and events. As this research will show, these organizations serve other latent functions besides serving as a channel for funds.

**A Drop in the Bucket: Transnational Philanthropy for Development Work in India by  
the Indian American Community**

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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## CHAPTER ONE: JUST A DROP IN THE BUCKET

*Mohan came to the United States from India in the late 1990s to pursue his graduate degree in Environmental Engineering. After completion of his degree, he secured a position with a prominent U.S.-based research firm. Mohan became successful in his professional life, and obtained a Green Card, eventually becoming a Citizen of the United States. Like many Indians who had moved abroad, anytime Mohan visited India, he complained about the heat, the dirt, the poverty, and prevailing social attitudes, especially when he went to visit his family's home village.*

*When a family member became ill, Mohan went on an extended trip to India. While there, he became involved in several matters impacting the village. He realized that he had the knowledge and skills to address some of those issues. For example, the village had intermittent electricity and frequent power cuts. Mohan, with buy-in from the community, built a hydroelectric generator to ensure a sustainable source of electricity for the village. Through his varied interactions with villagers, Mohan realized that his scientific skills and knowledge can help drive a movement for a better life for the villagers.*

This example is the dream of many Non-Resident Indians (NRIs): making a significant impact in India, using their skills and knowledge. However, in this case, Mohan is actually a fictional character portrayed by the prominent Hindi cinema actor Shah Rukh Khan in the 2004 movie *Swades*. The storyline of this film has played into the imaginary of the Indian diaspora to “give back to India,” and is one of the first films to strike a direct chord with the diaspora, inviting them to be a key part of India’s development. The film draws on the ethos of one of the most famous NRIs, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, starting with a quote from Gandhi (Sinha 2012: 186).<sup>1</sup> The *Swades* storyline has been compelling to Indians abroad who want to contribute in a meaningful way back to India. The desire to “return” or “giving back” has become so strong that the anniversary of Gandhi’s return to India from South Africa is marked by an annual conference of India’s

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is: “Hesitating to act because the whole vision might not be achieved or because others do not yet share it, is an attitude that only hinders progress.”

worldwide diaspora, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, inviting them to “brush in some of the new colors into the ever-evolving canvas of India’s development” (Vajpayee 2003, quoted in Sinha 2012: 185). January 2003 marked the first meeting of the “largest gathering of the global Indian family” at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas – or “Day of the Indians Abroad.” The focus of the gathering, then and today, has been about the need to “strengthen the ‘already present’ historical and cultural ties between India (the “motherland”) and Indians abroad (her children).” The Prime Minister at that time, L.K. Advani, remarked that it was a long-overdue recognition of India’s ties to its emigrants but was a confluence of “two historical developments – the coming of age of India and the coming of age of Indians working and living abroad” (Varadarajan 2010: 4). Since 2003, these annual conferences have become an acknowledgement of Vishwa Bharati (Global India) and are framed as a commemoration of the various successes of the Indian diaspora, in their communities abroad but also in the impact they make in India from abroad.

The relationship between migration and development in sending countries has been a focus of academic scholars, policy planners, and politicians in developing countries, especially within the context of globalization and cross-border flows of human capital (Glick Schiller 2010; Glick Schiller and Faist 2010). Migrants, in many of these studies, are a tool to spur development, whether it is through remittances, technology and knowledge transfers, or other key strategic exchanges (Merz, Chen, and Geithner 2007). The ways in which these flows shape political and economic landscapes has also been a key area of research (Kapur 2010: 2). A largely unexplored area of this relationship is the agency of migrants to contribute to development, independent of government programs or incentives, through self-founded philanthropic organizations based in their host country.



India has drawn a lot of attention for these issues because of the migration of highly skilled, highly educated migrants to developed countries, specifically the United States. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, as of 2000, 20 million Indians lived outside of India (Agarwal 2015a: 84). Highlighting the role transnational Indians can play in development has been a major shift in the Indian government's relationship with transnational Indians since Independence in 1947. There was a purposeful distance between the state and the diaspora, even though overseas Indians had been identified as an essential part of the nation during the struggle against colonialism, by highlighting the discrimination faced by Indians in various British colonies and their role in defining an Indian nationalism (Varadarajan 2010: 52). The relationship between India and its diaspora was best summed up in a speech by Nehru in September 1957, who stated,

We have left it to the Indians abroad whether they continue to remain Indian nationals or to adopt the nationality of whichever country they live in. It is entirely up for them to decide. If they remain Indian nationals, then all they can claim abroad is favorable alien treatment. If they adopt the nationality in the country they live in, they should associate themselves as closely as possible with the interest of the people they have adopted and never make it appear to function in any way that they become an exploiting agency there (Quoted in Varadarajan 2010: 51).

The Indian government has had an ambivalent attitude towards migrants, seeing them as the dreaded "brain drain" during the 1960s and 70s and a "brain bank" during the 1980s and 90s to "brain gain" in the 2000s (Khadria 2010: 179). The Indian nation-state has moved beyond a *laissez faire* attitude towards its diaspora, and now, reimagines its relations with diasporic populations in an engaging, positive way, viewing citizens overseas as an asset. There have been increasing efforts to capture the benefits of transnationalism and foster it through state-led initiatives (Raghuram 2008: 320). The emergence of modern

diasporas and their socioeconomic and political roles have been linked to development of capitalism on a global scale, mediated by the structures of the state (Vardarajan 2010: 42).

In September 2000, in response to the rising success of the Indian diaspora in Silicon Valley, the Government of India set up a High Level Committee under Dr. L.M. Singhvi to conduct a comprehensive study of the global Indian diaspora and to recommend ways in which the government could build relationships with it. The committee identified fifty areas of government action, ranging from improving entry facilities to streamlining regulations, and creating focal points for diaspora dealings. Most of the recommendations centered on obstacles, as perceived by the diaspora, such as opaque and complicated regulations, perceptions of rampant corruption, and lack of accountability (Kapur et al. 2004: 204). The sentiment of transforming brain drain to brain gain continues to be a mantra repeated by the Indian government. In a ceremony to commemorate the opening of a Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in New Delhi, a center for overseas Indians in the nation's capital, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated, "Brain drain worries can be converted into brain gain if we see the Indian diaspora as a strength rather than counting them just as numbers" (Kumar, Feb. 10, 2016).

These major shifts in policy raise a number of questions about the nature of development, the politics around this concept, and the transnational linkages between diasporas and their home country. At its core, this dissertation will contribute to our understanding of these issues by highlighting how the politics surrounding the issue of development are translated into the work of diasporic philanthropic organizations. Secondly, this research will recognize the growing role of the Indian diaspora in development issues in India. Over the past 30 years, economic and political changes have

created a space for civil society organizations to take a greater role in service provision. Finally, this dissertation highlights the diversity of organizations in the Indian American community. Prior literature has highlighted that these organizations provided a space for ethnic solidarity for new immigrants. As this research will highlight, the growth of the Indian community has created a diversification of organizations, allowing members to be selective, along ideological lines, with which organizations they choose to engage. The location of this research is a major urban center in the West Coast that has seen a rapid growth of the Indian American community over the past 20 years.

For this research project, I will focus on the work of volunteers working with three philanthropic voluntary organizations in the Indian American community supporting development-related issues in India. These organizations are driven predominately by the work of volunteers. Additionally, because of the unique landscape of Indian American organizations, I will also investigate differences between religious and secular organizations. For this research, I chose to study three local chapters of the following organizations:

- **Shikshan:** An organization that funds education projects and is closely aligned with the Hindu Right in India. The basic conceptualization of development is based on growth economics.
- **Asai:** This organization also funds education projects. Asai engages in centrist politics, and strictly maintains no religious or political affiliations, including informal ties. Development is seen as a social good.
- **Vikas Sangathan:** Initially founded to support education projects, funding is now given to other projects focusing on a range of issues like health, the environment or agricultural support, and caste and gender issues. This group works closely with grassroots organizations to identify alternative forms of development and consequently be described as being more “left-leaning.”

These three organizations were chosen for this research because they are the forerunners of philanthropic voluntary organizations in the Indian community sending funds to India. All three were also founded at roughly the same time. Finally, the chapters in this study were also among the largest chapters in the United States in terms of their fundraising capacity and the amount of funds distributed to India each year. A deeper discussion of how these organizations are structured, how they function, and their history will be outlined in more detail in Chapter Two.

As this research will show, these organizations serve other latent functions besides channeling funds to the homeland. This research aims to focus on individuals who are involved in organizations as volunteers, driving the work of these philanthropic voluntary organizations. Specifically, in this dissertation, I focus on how three voluntary philanthropic organizations in the Indian community in the United States conceptualize development, the linkages this has to the political leanings of these organizations, and why volunteers feel drawn to participate in these particular organizations. These organizations, predominantly driven by volunteers, engage in work to meet social needs and solve community problems beyond the government (Eikenberry 2009: 8). This dissertation is organized, by chapter, to answer the following questions:

- How do the secular or religious dynamics at play in India and the diaspora shape ideologies of development espoused by these organizations? How does this reflect the politics at home and abroad?
- How do individuals in these organizations understand their work in the organization and its relation to development and social issues in the homeland?
- Given the unique character of these organizations, as compared to other ethnic organizations, what is the particular space for belonging that is created in these

organizations? And how are members socialized to the functions of a non-profit organization?

To better understand the context in which these three Indian-American voluntary organizations operate, the ways that globalization and neoliberal philosophies have changed the nature of the state will be necessary to understand how the diaspora has taken a larger role in development and the provision of services in their home countries.

### **Understanding Globalization and Neoliberalism**

Pinning down what one means by globalization has always been a highly contested project. Globalization is often defined from different political perspectives that at times are contradictory to each other. Globalization, in a positive light, generally suggests a deepening integration of the world, leading to a shift in patterns of social interaction. Distant communities become more linked and the reach of power relations across the world's major regions and continents expands. Through this process of global integration, there is growing convergence of cultures and civilizations (Held and McGrew 2003: 4). More critical scholars argue that globalization is inexorably linked with global capitalism and the expansion of markets (McMichael 2005: 111). From this critical perspective, where globalization is the mode for the expansion of markets and a tool for global capitalism, neoliberalism is the driving ideology of this process.

Neoliberalism seeks to connect with an intellectual lineage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century system established on laissez faire policies of free trade, less government regulation, and a reliance on "self-interest and individualism, segregation of ethical principles from economic affairs," where economic morality is merely cost-benefit analysis and profit

maximization of markets (von Werlhof 2008: 95). The philosophy of neoliberalism revolves around unhindered markets as a means to obtain phenomenal economic growth for the greater good. However, the history of neoliberalism actually reveals that trickle-down economics, the idea that the poor will also benefit from economic growth, is never realized. Instead, free market ideologies fit specific interests of a few powerful parties who call upon government regulation for their own interests (Stiglitz 2001: viii). The work of Karl Polanyi perhaps most clearly delineates the false logic of market societies and the resulting political and social impacts. Polanyi's work anticipated many of the drastic changes that would result from marketization of economies. Market societies, according to Polanyi, are constituted by two opposing forces, that of laissez faire politics, to expand the scope of the market, and protective countermovements to resist disembedding the economy (Block 2001: xxviii). Markets also entail a greater deal of specialization and division of labor, a division that exacerbates currently existing social inequalities (Polanyi 2001: 46). On the political front, neoliberalism has implications for the state's structure and its functions.

### **Conceptualizations of the State: Changes Brought by Globalization and Neoliberalism**

Within a neoliberal framework, the duties of the state shift from governance to economic concerns. The state controls institutions for political participation, representation, and mediation (Costilla 2000: 83), and political faith is placed in the efficacy of markets and a greater reliance on civil society as a substitute for public institutes (Evans 1997: 62). The basic tenets of neoliberalism advocate for the slashing of public expenditure and the retreat of the state. By rolling back the state's role in regulating the economy, one of the key tenets of neoliberal ideology, economic advisors and policy

makers claim to have replaced the cumbersome state with a nimble, favorable regulatory regime, effective in improving physical infrastructure (Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011: 1).

The rapid rise of international trade and investment has altered state power. In classic, realist state theory, powerful economic actors were presumed to have an interest in the political and economic capacities of their states:

As long as private economic actors were dependent on the political environment provided by a particular state, it made sense for them to identify with the political successes and aspirations of that state (Evans 1997: 68).

However, with globalization, and the transnational mobility of capital, economic interests challenge the political authority of the state. Coupled with bureaucratic reform and structural adjustment measures, industrial capitalism and finance has come to dominate global politics and economics (Costilla 2000: 86), The state has become “superfluous for capital,” with significant power in the hands of transnational capital (Costilla 2000; Robinson 2005). These changes have led to the hollowing of the state, or creation of a shadow state, resulting in the rising political and economic power of non-state actors (Evans 1997: 64; Duffy 2000: 550).

Despite these transformations, nation-states have played a significant role in facilitating the flow of capital; the policies the state enacts are the political making of the free-market system (Munck 2005: 60). Structural adjustment, cutbacks to social service programs, de-regulation, and other hallmarks of political neoliberalism give primacy to markets over social welfare. The emergence of markets is facilitated by the government’s conscious interventions and the use of violence (Polyani 2001: 258). The state acts to limit

freedoms, through both coercive and non-coercive mechanisms, to benefit capital, including limiting democratic protest and expression, eroding labor rights, and stripping away other protections for workers. Instead, citizens are encouraged to become consumers (Munck 2005: 67). This power to intervene on behalf of the interests of capital remains a key role for the government in a neoliberal framework. Therefore, others argue that the state has not been rolled back but has been transformed (Munck 2005: 63). I argue, however, that in some areas, such as regulation of the economy and service provision, the state has truly been rolled back.

The roll-back of the state from social welfare provision has been accompanied by a roll-out of new programs to fill the void left by the state (Munshi and Willse 2005: xvi). *This void has often been filled by non-governmental organizations or NGO's.* As will be seen, along with liberalization, changes in laws and policies towards migrants by sending countries has led to greater engagement with diasporas and extending the boundaries and definitions of citizenship. These policies include state contact with those that have left to facilitate return or policies to ensure that those who have settled abroad are still members of the nation-state (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1019).

If liberalization shapes one agenda of the state, then development forms another supporting role of the state, focused on the project of nation-state building and creating spaces of scientific-bureaucratic intervention (Kamat 2002: 3). As highlighted above, the changing role of the state has introduced a new form of governmentality shaped by the ideology of neoliberalism. No longer does the state drive large-scale development interventions, such as the planned development pursued by Nehru in a newly independent India, investing in dams and steel plants. Instead, the focus is on economic growth, equating



affluence with development. This can be understood as developmentality (Deb 2009: 2). A regime of global governance, development discourses and institutions place economic growth at the center of state policies and as a means for Third World countries to gain autonomy over their governance (Gupta 1998: 10; Bergeron 2006). While the government, in a developmental state, may have some protections in place to nurture and growth indigenous industries, there is a close working relationship between capitalists and state officials (Wade 2018: 526). Perhaps what most distinguishes the developmental state and its interactions with neoliberalism is,

Not the existence of intervention per se but rather the developmental ambition and elite consensus that frames that intervention and the existence of institutional capacities that help translate ambition into more or less effective policy outcomes (Thurbon 2014, quoted in Wade 2018: 535).

The developmental state's shift towards neoliberalism has been facilitated by the fact that public welfare was and continues to be underdeveloped, and legal obstacles prevent collective action of marginalized groups (Wade 2018: 535). The state has withdrawn from labor-capital relations, which has impacted negotiations about wages and working conditions, and relies instead on the "discipline of the market," where unemployment, for example, becomes a tool for control (Wade 2018: 534). One result of this emphasis on economic growth, by any means necessary, is that social movements to block development projects undertaken by the state or private entities are labeled as anti-national. As will be seen, this figures into the politics of development in India and the work pursued by the organizations in this study.

## **Perspectives on Development**

Development can be defined as “the range of actions that can shape the ideals, policies, practices, and power relations that ultimately determine people’s material and symbolic life chances” (Agarwala 2015b: 5). Development, broadly defined, includes economic growth, poverty reduction, social advancement, and socio-economic equity (Yong and Rahman 2013: 6). Development is a multi-layered concept fraught with the politics of colonization, imperialism, and neoliberal economics (Zachariah 2005: 1). Critics of development claim that contemporary development processes are flawed but are basically positive and inevitable. In this light, non-governmental organizations have been seen a tool to mitigate some of the negative outcomes of development (Fisher 1997: 443). Social development refers to broader processes that encompass not just income-based approaches. It also includes the accumulation of non-material assets, such as physical health, education and skills, and institutional change to facilitate welfare and development in the community (Yong and Rahman 2013: 14). As shall be seen, there are a number of perspectives regarding what the development project looks like. These debates about what development looks like and its end goal are key debates taking place within the diaspora organizations in this study and guide decision-making. More specifically, these different perspectives of development guide their different paths and the projects they choose to support.

In the post-1945 world, development has entailed discourses of modernity and progress. With the end of World War II and rapid decolonization, attention was given to addressing poverty in many former colonies, without acknowledging colonization’s role in contributing to poverty (Craggs 2014: 5). In many ways, development became an extension of the colonial project, a civilizing mission based on Enlightenment ideas of improvement.

This formed the basis for more conservative theorizations of development, where the West was placed as the ideal and classical economic theories like comparative advantage, which emphasized the economic efficiency of global free trade, drove development agendas. The modernization perspective linked the growth of capital markets to development and continue to have traction today since the rise of new right ideologies during the 1980s, emphasizing limited government intervention in the economy, increasing privatization, and public sector cutbacks (Desai and Potter 2014: 79).

Modernization theory must be thought of as “intervening tools to reshape the post-colonial non-industrial societies according to the intention and model of the imperialist countries during the Cold War” (Akhter 2006: 92). This discourse frames globalization as the tool to enable the development of the Third World. According to Modernization theory, development equates with discussions of economic change and progress, an

ideal vision of the ethical, cultural, political, economic and social character of individuals and whole societies, and the imposition of a systematic and all-encompassing process that will enable this transformation (Kamat 2002: 1).

Development is fetishized as an object of desire. It is a goal that is appealing yet seemingly impossible to achieve. The idea of development creates powerful expectations for those who are the subject of development and the agencies promising to deliver on promises of development (Pandian 2009: 10).

In reaction to more conservative approaches to development, radical-dependency theories highlighted the cause of underdevelopment as stemming from global supply chains, where extraction of surplus from the periphery benefitted the core (Desai and Potter 2014: 80). World systems theory further built on dependency theory to highlight the rise of a semi-periphery consisting of newly industrialized countries in East Asia and Latin

America. Furthermore, world systems theory highlights how throughout its history, the capitalist world system has brought about a skewed development in which economic and social disparities between sections of the world economy have increased rather than provided prosperity for all (Wallerstein 1974).

In light of the failures of development, calls for more participatory forms of development arose. These perspectives emphasized inclusion of local communities and indigenous knowledge and creation of alternative forms of development, focused on grassroots and bottom-up approaches, as opposed to top-down technocratic interventions (Desai and Potter 2014: 81). Critical development studies focused on rights-based or social welfare focused development. This basic needs approach suggested that for development to occur, the delivery of basic human services, like education or healthcare, was needed to address inequalities and rising poverty rates (Elliott 2014: 29). Taking this one step further, Sen (1999) suggested that certain freedoms, political freedom, economic, and social opportunity to name a few, are key parts of not just ensuring basic needs but also determining quality of life and well-being.

### **The State and Development in India**

The emergence of a developmental state in post-Independence India had the goal of building a modern society in India (Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011: 8). For the next 40 years, India was governed through a policy regime of centralized planning and an extensive regulatory framework (Wadhava 2003: 31). Poverty alleviation and development came to dominate social policy during this time period. This period also reflected consolidation of state power, with discourses of “nationalism, democracy and secularism,” which “spoke in

the name of the nation and all interest groups” (Ray and Katzenstein 2005: 7). Over its years of rule, from Independence in 1947 to the 1960s, the Congress government sought international development experts and institutions to chart a modernization strategy that relied mostly on the establishment of industry; India pursued a mixed economy of state planning and capitalism (Gupta 1998: 13). Industrialization took place under the auspices of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), based on the rationale that industrialization was needed to overcome colonial and semi-colonial legacies of specialization in the export of a few primary commodities. Industrialization was promoted through incentives, such as tax breaks and subsidies, as well as protection from foreign competition (Kiely 2007: 51). ISI in India focused on heavy industry, like steel production, and gave private sector companies licenses to develop these new industries.

The death of Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, in 1964 resulted in a political reshuffling, lessening control of the Congress Party, and a new political discourse about social policies. Rhetoric about poverty alleviation rose through populism. By the early 1970s, poverty rose sharply, due to rising prices and food shortages in the late 1960s. Development economists and international agencies became critical of the ability of macroeconomic factors to address poverty and instead advocated for poverty alleviation programs; then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in a move to garner support during the 1971 and 1972 elections, announced a populist campaign, “*garibi hatao*” (end/destroy poverty), along these lines (Ray and Katzenstein 2005: 8). However, Indira Gandhi used the Congress party as a personal vehicle for power, and faced massive protests to her rule before declaring the Emergency in 1975. The Emergency initiated rule by decree and put a freeze on elections and civil liberties. After the Emergency, the Congress Party lost legitimacy,

which in some cases corresponded to a loss of confidence in the state, as it could “no longer be trusted to deliver services or act in good faith” (Ray and Katzenstein 2005: 9).

During the 1980s, the pressures of liberalization, to cut back on government social safety net spending and regulations, were felt and grew in force over the course of the decade. This period saw shifts in governance and the rise of religious nationalism. While many point to 1991 as the watershed year that India’s economy liberalized, others argue that this transition began under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, with a turn towards consumption as a guiding economic principle. This focus on providing commodities for the middle class resulted in the growth of the private sector and industrialization (LaDousa 2014: 5). Ultimately, the policy shifts in 1991 signaled a break from the state-led development paradigm. Liberalization included political reforms along with economic ones. Processes of decentralization rapidly took place; authority from the Central government devolved to local government entities (Meenakshisundaram 1999: 55). Decentralization entailed giving more power to local government bodies, like the Panchayat Raj, village-level governing councils responsible for administering village affairs especially in economic development matters.

Decentralization should be understood within the context of two contrary tendencies: globalization and demands for local self-governance. Globalization has had an immediate impact of the world capital market on governing institutions and the decisions that affect the lives of people (Kothari 1999: 47). In one way, decentralization is a means to increase democratic participation and enable the empowerment of different social groups (Jha 1999: 25). From another perspective, decentralization is necessary for governance due to the size and socio-economic complexity of a country, in order to recognize the special

needs and demands of different regions and groups (Jha 1999: 15). Decentralization can also be read as a reaction to the over-centralization of Indian federalism under Indira Gandhi in the 1970s and to different movements across the country reasserting regional pluralism (Hardgrave and Kochanek 2008: 189). In light of liberalization, decentralization is a result of weakened centralized power, with state governments and local entities having greater freedom to act on development issues. Some envisioned this as the rise of a people-centered approach to resolve local problems and ensure economic and social justice, where the beneficiaries become the engine of development (Kothari 1999: 48). With all of these political and economic changes, local social actors could take a larger role in development issues.

### **Civil Society and NGOization as a Result of Neoliberalism**

As a social space, civil society is popularly thought of as a space for democracy that allows for participation, discussion, and decision-making (Ghosh 2009: 481). Civil societies are a pluralist space that may also be contentious (Chandhoke 2009: 821). With the retreat of the state, and in line with the principles of neoliberalism, civil society has come to be seen as the stopgap in providing social services once provided by the state. Philanthropic organizations have emerged at a nexus of social, economic, and political trends that have changed the way people view volunteerism and relate to their community, amid government cutbacks, privatization, and a growing demand upon non-profit institutes to address community needs (Eikenberry 2009: x). The increasing role of third parties in development issues or social service delivery is seen as a shift from the “age of government” to the “age of governance” beyond the state (Eikenberry 2009:5). This could

also be understood as the NGOization of civil society, “crowding out some of the more protest-oriented forms of organizing within the social movement sector” (Ray and Katzenstein 2005: 9; Chandhoke 2009). Others have called this the rise of the “non-profit industrial complex,” a set of symbiotic relationships linking political and financial technologies of state and class control (Smith 2007: 8). It has been argued that the voluntary sector is now a “shadow state,” delivering services once the purview of the government (Gilmore 2007: 45), often serving communities and external constituencies to whom they are not directly answerable (Ghosh 2009: 475).

NGOs in India have played an active part in development from the time of Independence to the present-day. NGOs first provided welfare and relief, as silent partner to the state and its development projects. Most NGO practices were aimed towards mitigating the impacts of poverty and providing a social safety net (Kudva 2005: 241). During the 1970s, a spate of famines, inflation, devaluation, unemployment, and the breakdown of the Congress Party’s political power all created great political and social instability; all of this led to a disillusionment with conventional institutions of planning, politics, and development (Sheth and Sethi 1996: 284). At this time, the NGO sector grew and began to employ new conceptualizations of poverty-alleviation and focused more on livelihood issues. From 1989 onwards, NGOs became even more prominent in civil society, leading the state to view NGOs as a partner in state building (Kudva 2005: 234). Over time, the non-governmental sector has increased its legitimacy and, for some, has come to be regarded as more effective for societal governance than the state (Eikenberry 2009: 5).

As will be seen, in the next section, the creation of a transnational social field has enabled diasporas to be one of the key non-state actors playing an increasing role in



addressing development in their home country. As a result of the vacuum created by decentralization, migrants have been taking a leading role in enacting a strategy of “co-development,” with migration fueling development in sending countries through remittances and other flows of goods and information (Faist 2010: 70).

Co-development as a concept has been a powerful notion, leading to changes in the policies of sending countries towards their diasporas. For example, some countries have introduced dual citizenship programs, granted absentee voting rights, given tax incentives for citizens abroad, and variously co-opted migrant organizations or home associations for development work. Additionally, the potential economic boon from temporary returns, visits and other transactions has been recognized, in distinction from permanent return, reflecting that “even if there is no eventual return, the commitment of migrants living abroad could be tapped” (Faist 2010: 72). Co-development initiatives have focused on the potential of migrants to contribute to their place of origin. These initiatives often include contributing to educational programs, encouraging return to the place of origin, involving migrants in cooperation projects, in educating and guiding potential emigrants, creating and promoting bridges between communities, fostering interactions between national, state, and local government and actors, and improving the living and working conditions of migrants (Wise and Covarrubias 2010: 153). Through philanthropic voluntary organizations, these members of the diaspora seek to contribute back to their homeland.

### **Transnational Social Fields**

Transnationalism is characterized by a high intensity of exchanges, new modes of transacting, and a multiplicity of activities happening across borders (Singh et al. 2010: 11).

For immigrant communities, transnationalism is a process for forging and maintaining multi-stranded relations that link together societies of settlement and origin. These social relations extend to familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political ties spanning borders (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc Szanton 1992: 1). Diaspora communities serve as a cultural bridge to facilitate cross-border movement of goods, share ideas and knowledge, and provide networks for various socio-economic ventures (Yong and Rahman 2013: 1). Vertovec (2000) highlights the multiple forms in which diaspora can exist: diaspora as social form, diaspora as a type of consciousness, and diaspora as a mode of cultural production. Diaspora as a social form evokes the social relationships that individuals have to a shared culture and the processes of becoming a diaspora, inclusive of social ties through geography and history. In some ways, then, Diaspora can act as a type of consciousness, awareness that is supposed to be generated by contemporary transnational communities, but is also, in part, a duality of “living with the sense of simultaneously ‘home away from home’ or ‘here and there’” (Vertovec 2000: 147).

Because of the duality of these feelings for home, migrants constantly maintain their connections to their homeland, but also recognize themselves and act as being in a collective community. In order for diaspora, as a concept, to be useful for analyzing new forms of identity, diasporic journey and formations must be historicized and explained through a lens that highlights how different groups are positioned in relation to the dominant group (Bhatia 2007: 33). Transnationalism offers migrants a new space of socialization, away from national/local policies, and can open new networks across borders (Baas et al. 2012: 8).

For this reason, Levitt and Glick-Schiller's (2004) concept of transnational social fields is apropos to this dissertation. Diasporic lives span more than just one nation's boundaries. In parallel to living in one country, individuals can have connections to homeland through various linkages, and these linkages and multiple locations become reflected in migrants' identities and cultural production. Therefore, a transnational social field is a set of "multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1009). Such a conceptualization moves beyond just experiences of migration to include interactions and relationships between those that leave and those that stay. These transnational social fields, on the one hand, include immigrants and their social and political organizations, and on the other hand, the political institutes and state apparatus of the country of origin (Østergaard-Nielson 2003: 764). Migrants can have various impacts, both positive and negative, on the position of the state in the world economic order and influence internal functions of the state. In terms of the former, they can influence nation-building and transformation and towards the latter, can push for greater privatization of services once provided by the government. Nation-states, which once held a monopoly on power, have refashioned themselves in transnational social fields to retain status; as a result, long-distance nationalism, which will be discussed at length later in this dissertation, is practiced, fostering a sense of national unity, with the dangerous potential byproduct being the creation of ethnocentric movements instead (Beciu, Madroane, Carlan, and Ciocea 2017: 231). For diasporas that engage with local counterparts in the home country, this has been referred to as "transnationalism from below" (Østergarrd-Nielson 2003: 764). In the Indian context, this has led to the rise of

Hindu nationalism. At the same time, migrants can also impact policies and processes in their host country (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1014). A two-way bridge between home and host country enables migrants, in one direction, to transfer funds and ideas from the US to affect development at home, and in return, their elite status shapes the focus of development agendas and enhances their power over the government in India (Agarwala 2015a: 86).

Within this research, it is important to look at how migrants form broader networks in their host country that transcend local communities and extend back to the home country (Verdery, Mouw, Edelbute, and Chavez 2017: 59). For example, what ties do the participants in the organizations build with other volunteers and the larger Indian American community? What relationships are formed with actors on the ground in India and with the wider social field, inclusive of all the actors and relations involved in the process of sending funds to India: non-profits in India that partner with the US-based organizations, volunteers, and donors, to name a few?

The transnational linkages migrants maintain with their home country have received much scholarly attention, with a focus on the financial and economic flows to the home country (Glick Schiller and Faist 2010). Remittances have been at the front and center of those discussions of financial flows and the impact these funds make on local economies and social structures (Kurien 2002; Kapur 2010; Anyaanwa and Erhijuakapor 2010; Lee 2005). Research has also started to focus on the growing practice of collective remittances, largely coming from hometown or regional associations to support the communities and localities from which the migrants originate (Mercer, Page, and Martin 2008). Changes with the digital age have facilitated the transference of capital and ideas.

Coupled with the growing wealth of those in the tech industry, especially in the Indian and Chinese diasporas, there has been a dramatic increase of these financial flows (Gaberman 2004: vii). Of interest to this study is how these technological and economic changes have aided diaspora philanthropy and enabled immigrants to establish institutions in the United States to benefit organizations in India and shed light on the presence and work of diasporas on a transnational level.

The organizations in this study operate in a transnational space that depends on sustained ties of individuals, networks, and organizations across nation-states. Often, the exchanges that take place within these organizations are not just one-way, with money flowing from US-based organizations to project partners in India. There are numerous reciprocal exchanges that occur: NGO and project coordinators from India come to the United States to speak at various meetings and chapters of the donor organizations, and US-based volunteers from organizations travel to India to visit project sites, either for evaluative purposes or to see the work they are contributing to first hand.

### **Migration and Development**

Historically, migration and development, though not explicitly seen as part of the field of development studies, have been linked as early as the late 1910s. William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki conducted research on the Polish immigrant community in the United States and the role of “supra-territorial organizations” in Polish-American adaptation in the United States but also in processes of modernization in Poland (Faist 2010: 68). During the 1960s, governments of the global South saw out-migration as a means to address labor shortages in the Global North and development issues in the South.

Labor would go from South to North, acquire certain skills and knowledge, send remittances home, and eventually return to the South with higher levels of human capital (Faist 2010: 68). At the same time, arising from the global South, as a counter to Modernization Theory, theorists pointed to the widening gaps between rich and poor countries, stemming from, as they saw it, North-South dependency. This turn in development theory created a call for “alternative development” that sought to be more “needs-oriented”, “self-reliant” and endogenous, or even “alternatives to development” (van Naerssen et al 2008: 9). The key issue became brain drain, not remittances, especially when the United States and European countries changed immigration laws to limit entry to mostly skilled and highly educated workers. Out-migration contributed to continuing underdevelopment; for example, between one-third and one-half of the world’s science and technology personnel lived in OECD countries (Faist 2010: 69). Slowly, neoliberal economic policies were introduced in many countries and concerns about development shifted towards a rhetoric of markets.

Diaspora-homeland development, Patterson (2006) argues, is “founded on sentimental and material arguments for a bounded ethnic group” (1896). While other personal identities exist, like class, business associations and professional standing, these linkages are far less organic relative to personal/collective identity based on national association. Furthermore, ethnic group members tend to be socialized through a number of emotive issues like shared heritage, fictive familial ties, and national mythologies, and a shared sense of “vulnerabilities and anxieties” (Patterson 2006: 1896).

In the Indian context, it is important to also acknowledge the role religion plays in the general orientation of the organizations and their development paradigm. The

relationship between religious institutions and the state differs in many respects from the relationship between these institutions in the United States. Religion plays a much more visible role in Indian politics, and the state routinely involves itself in religious matters (Levitt 2008: 771). Because of this dynamic, secularism in India has been a constantly evolving notion, but it can be understood as a political phenomenon that does not necessitate official separation of the state from religions and religious communities altogether, but rather, requires symmetrical treatment of different communities (Sen 2004: 457).

The tension between the secular and the religious has been a prominent feature of the Indian polity, with Hindu nationalism emerging in resistance to the secular state (Devji 1992: 5). This division has played into the juxtaposition of “secular Nehruvian socialism” of India’s early independent year with the BJP’s pro-market economic policies of the 1990s (Zachariah 2005: xii). This same tension exists in the Indian diaspora. Conservative Hindu political parties and organizations have stressed a homogenizing of Hindu culture as part of a defining element of the religion and nation, and have attacked a pseudo-secular state which, in their perception, favors religious minorities. At the same time, these forces vouch for the tolerance of Hinduism, despite the fact that such claims of tolerance do not “square with tolerance of hierarchies, inequalities, and communal violence” (Hasan 2010: 199). This dichotomy is important to investigate in relation to the organizations in this study and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

In light of political and economic liberalization, associations in diasporas have been encouraged as a tool of development and resources for home country governments (Mercer et al. 2008: 65). Development initiatives, in this context, are defined by political

and economic elites. In India, development is commonly perceived by social elites as a “social good” for the whole of society,

More than infrastructure projects- dams, highways, irrigation canals, resource extraction enterprises- that have traditionally been conjured by the concept.... in rapidly developing new towns such as Gurgaon and on the fringes of other cities, malls, gated communities, entertainment complexes, country clubs and all markers of conspicuous middle-class affluence and consumption abound (Bose 2008: 124).

While these initiatives have provided major payoffs for upper and middle class urban dwellers, they have had detrimental impacts for rural, disadvantaged groups, and have proven to be taxing on resources, land, forests, water, and labor, in appropriate ways (Kumar 2000: 160). Development proves to be a contested term that theoretically encompasses more than just economic development; various development actors would also describe development as needing to include sustainable economic growth, social advancement, and increasing freedom and democracy. Therefore, the connections between diaspora and migration and development are multi-dimensional and complex (van Naerssen et al. 2008: 3).

The focus of development, spurred by migration, has been on its economic aspects, including analyzing the impacts of remittances and brain drain. Migration and development are conceptualized in two ways: the vicious circle and the virtuous circle. The vicious circle sees migration and development as antithetical concepts, in which migration is incapable of initiating the dynamics of development in the sending country, causing, instead, adverse effects like inflation, productive disarticulation, reduced economic activity, and depopulation, and in turn, more out-migration. Migration entails considerable costs and



risk, but also requires specific skills, knowledge, and access to social networks (de Haas 2008: 21).

More relevant to this research, the virtuous circle sees migration as being able to aid local and regional development, with heavy support from international organizations with a neoliberal bent, like the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Wise and Covarrubias 2010: 149). However, these perspectives do not highlight the complexity of migration and development issues and only look at these issues in a unidirectional manner. To understand the problems of development, asymmetrical power relations between countries, the reconfiguration of productive chains, the restructuring of labor markets, and social inequalities must also be considered (Wise and Covarrubias 2010: 157). This approach also ignores that while there is underdevelopment in the sending country, migrants, both low and high skilled, contribute to development in the receiving country, by providing labor at lower rates than those demanded by national citizens and through consumption of goods in the receiving country (Wise and Covarrubias 2010: 160).

The migration-development nexus has been emphasized in part because the perceived developmental benefits of international migration are being used by countries in the Global North to justify attempts to attract labor from the Global South, to counter the “brain drain” argument. A second reason this nexus is attracting attention is because of the sheer volume of international remittances sent each year and the potential impacts of this money, with policy makers wishing this money to go towards what they perceive to be positive directions (Mercer et al. 2008: ix).

More recently, other phenomena like brain gain, skill formation, and migrant entrepreneurship, have come to the forefront of research about development impacts of migration (van Naerssen et al. 2008: 4). In addition to remittances, the economic boon and trade that comes from migrant entrepreneurs has been beneficial to sending countries (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1022). Often, these entrepreneurs maintain close ties with their home country and come from the economic elite of society in both the home and host country. The firms they establish benefit both home and host countries economically (Portes, Guarnizo, Haller 2002: 293). Saxenian (2002) identified this phenomenon as brain circulation. At the time of Saxenian's study in 2000, 53% of the high-skilled scientists and engineers in Silicon Valley were foreign-born, with Indian and Chinese immigrants comprising over one-quarter of the total workforce of scientists and engineers (36). These skilled workers are highly mobile and influence economic development by transferring technology and know-how, either by returning home, starting new businesses, or influencing policy and institutions, while maintaining ties to both India and the United States (Saxenian 2000: 37). These flows of technology and capital should not be thought of as a one-way flow from the core to the periphery, but rather, as a "more complex and decentralized two-way flow of skill, capital, and technology" (Saxenian 2000: 54). Expanding the concept of brain circulation to transnational philanthropy, the organizations in this study go beyond just sending funds to support projects in India. There is an exchange of information, collaboration, and personal investments that are made by volunteers with project partners in India. As will be seen in a later chapter, these exchanges inform the knowledge volunteers have about social issues in India and contribute to their learnings. The ability of individuals to be engaged with their home and host countries

simultaneously and take advantage of various opportunities, social, economic, and political, across borders provides a setting for sustained brain circulation (Patterson 2007: 1).

In relation to these issues, Patterson conceptualizes the relationship between diasporas and development as “development *in* the diaspora, development *through* the diaspora, and development *by* the diaspora” (2006: 1897). Development in the diaspora refers to the resources pooled by the community for growing wealth for the security and improvement of the community in the United States. Through the diaspora, development takes the shape of networking between the diaspora and the home country, often through remittances and foreign direct investment. And finally, development *by* the diaspora relates specifically to action taken by overseas citizens to work exclusively towards development in the homeland, either through volunteer work or philanthropic endeavors (Patterson 2006: 1899).

All these theoretical, economic, and political shifts have meant changing conceptualizations of the relationship between the state and civil society over the last 50 years. The role migrant communities play in development and service delivery-oriented initiatives has been redefined. These actors have become part and parcel of liberal economic thought and participatory development approaches (Faist 2010: 83). Communities and civil society, inclusive of NGOs, grassroots organizations and other non-state actors, began to be viewed as legitimate actors in development policy implementation and policymaking.

### **Transnational Philanthropy for Development**

Philanthropy, in the traditional sense, is defined as private resources donated out of altruistic interest to advance human welfare; the private and voluntary transference of resources for the benefit of others irrespective of motives of the donor or other benefits that may come to the donor (Young and Shih 2004: 129). It represents a formalization of charity; a more “modern institutionalized and rationalized form of giving than charity” (Bornstein 2012: 37). In India, the context of philanthropy is influenced by the concept of *dān*, a gift that does not have reciprocity attached to it (Bornstein 2012: 12). This becomes complicated when considering giving to a non-profit, where the gift gives the donor a tax benefit. The notion of *dān* as a donation has been adapted to the growth of philanthropy; in both *dān* and philanthropy, the ideal would be that there is no motive in giving (Bornstein 2012: 30). *Dān*, over India’s history, has also evolved to be a social obligation of individuals, first in classical Hinduism, as a duty to help those in need, to the struggle for independence, where Mahatma Gandhi made it part of the “constructive work” to provide for the general welfare of all (Bornstein 2012: 35). Since liberalization, a new wealthy class has emerged in India and in its diaspora, leading to new forms of philanthropy, especially philanthropy that is a more relational and connective process, meant to build cohesion and community solidarity (Bornstein 2012: 38). This aspect of philanthropy is a fairly new development within the Indian context. Social institutions in India developed such that the needs of the underprivileged and vulnerable members of society were often cared for through joint families, caste members, or community councils (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004: 264).

Building upon the notion of philanthropy, Opiniano specifically defines diaspora philanthropy as

The process in which migrants or immigrants abroad allocate a certain portion of their remittances to fund development projects in the emigration country. As a result, migrants' transnational philanthropy builds transnational relations that link together origin and settlement society (2005: 227).

Remittances are the predominant means by which funds are sent, but organizations and social networks provide a social component to diaspora philanthropy that differs from remittances (Opiniano 2005: 227).

In thinking about diaspora philanthropy, the exchanges between philanthropic organizations and the projects they support in the home country should be thought of as transfers, operating on "a genuine desire to aid the recipient with no expectation of reciprocity" (Brown 2012: 3). Philanthropy from overseas migrants generally falls into five categories:

- 1) Traditional philanthropy that usually revolves around community organizations based in ethnic enclaves or hometown associations or those that prefer to give through personal contacts.
- 2) Mainstream institutions that are U.S. based but heavily involved in country-specific projects, bolstered by donations from nationals based in the United States.
- 3) Diaspora-based transnational NGOs founded by those in the Diaspora that have a mission towards serving the home country that can be professional, political, or religious in nature.
- 4) "New" community organizations founded by post-1965 immigrants, such as alumni organizations, hometown associations or professional organizations.
- 5) Transnational Academic Societies meant to link alumni to their institutions back in their home country (Yin and Lan 2004: 94).

The focus of this research is on the third type of organization.

Transnational philanthropy is not a new phenomenon, but it is changing in nature (Newland et al. 2010: 126). Several factors have heightened the intensity and durability of

transnational ties that facilitate philanthropy. These include: ease of travel and communication, increasingly important role migrants play in sending country economies, attempts by sending states to legitimize themselves by providing services to migrants and their children, increased importance of receiving-country states in the economic future of sending countries, and the social and political marginalization of immigrants in their host countries (Levitt 1998: 928). These advances have enabled funds to flow from donors in developed countries back to their home countries, creating a burgeoning culture of diaspora philanthropy.

One growing trend in the field of philanthropy is the use of the term social investment, as opposed to philanthropy, to emphasize the transformative potential of giving. Social investment has been defined as the,

Strategic and systematic investment of private philanthropic resources to address complex, inter-connected manifestations of chronic underdevelopment, with an emphasis on issues of poverty, education, the environment, and education (Newland et al. 2010: 128).

This view is not dissimilar from that of private charity in 1860s England, which differentiated between the deserving and undeserving poor, with the end to charity being the creation of a means to “make work the basis of relief” (Ziliak 2004: 436). As a result, these philanthropists-cum-investors look to fund projects that are aimed at policy reform or take a “hands-on approach to training, financial accounting, evaluation, and outcomes” and to some extent expect that there will be returns made to further philanthropic activities (Newland et al. 2010: 134).

The language of development philanthropy reflects these changes towards more business-like conduct of non-profit organizations, evoking language about social

entrepreneurship. Within this research, the language of development is a key part of understanding the ways in which organizations conceptualize development and how they contribute to framing the work (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 3). Generally, discourse refers to structures of language and communication, but an analysis entails a study of spoken as well as written language and the material effects of that usage. In this case, it would be an analysis that looks at how development is described, thought about and practiced, “reflected in text, conversation, and in actual development projects and standard operating procedures” (Ebrahim 2001: 80). For example, community participation, within the context of framing efforts as being at the grassroots, became operationalized to imply the provision of public goods and services through means other than the state, especially through non-governmental organizations. Throughout this paper, this is the form of philanthropy I will refer to: development philanthropy that entails more than just a passive donation but an engagement between the donor and the recipient, as will be seen with the work of the organizations in this study.

Development philanthropy from transnational communities has been a way to identify and test creative, innovative development approaches. These transfers can also include transmission of “talent, enterprise, skills, new attitudes, and new mind-sets,” and considering many of these philanthropists have acquired their wealth and status through the information technology industry, can make contributions in modern management, advanced technologies, market-based strategies, and an appreciation of the importance of human capital (Geithner et al. 2004: xxi). The key social impact, therefore, of this form of philanthropy is that it expands space for individuals and social actors to participate in transnational development. More specific to diaspora philanthropy, it has been theorized to

expand the range of strategies for solving social problems, especially in countries like India or China, where the perception is that government provisions of social services have reached limits of scale, sustainability and coverage (Geithner et al. 2004: xxi). These social remittances comprise the “expertise, ideas, and experiences of a country’s diaspora” (Levitt 2001: 11). This can include advice on institutional practices and change, especially as project partners in India want to attract more funding.

Levitt identified three types of social remittances: normative structures, which consist of ideas, norms, values, and beliefs; systems of practice, or actions shaped by normative structures; and social capital, linked with the prestige of the organization and its connections (2001: 62). In the case of the transnational relationships in this research, project partners come to the United States not just to share information about their projects but also seek input on new techniques and evaluation tools to use in their organizations. For this study, I will be studying one side of this exchange, looking at the volunteers based in the United States and how their participation is part and parcel of the transnational linkages organizations and individuals build with India. Through their involvement in these organization, volunteers acquire a number of skills and knowledges, building upon multiple capacities and privileges that volunteers possess, which can have tremendous impacts for their work vis-à-vis India. As shall be highlighted, the socialization that takes place in these organizations provides a background in how non-profit organizations work, a scope for analyzing development issues in India, and eventually the ability to enact the strategies of the organization to address those issues. The potential energy of these social remittances can transform community institutions and practices, but they also have implications for those involved with the organizations. Through their



involvement in these organizations, individuals learn to fundraise, work transnationally, and take the lead in being project stewards, voicing a vision of what development entails.

While scholars have looked at such efforts as a democratization of philanthropy (Eikenberry 2009: ix), diaspora philanthropy and involvement in development issues can present a number of potential problems. For one, much of the focus of diaspora giving and programming has been on social services delivery, displacing a role once provided by the state, a reflection of the growing neoliberal philosophy of governance in India. This shift also reflects the danger that overseas giving will be treated by the government as a long-term substitute for government budgeting and government services. Further, because diasporic giving is often skewed towards certain groups or regions, this can serve to reinforce or even increase inequalities in service provision (Sidel 2004: 239). For example, Indian diasporic giving often neglects the truly poor and promotes giving to areas with which the giver has an affinity, such as an alumni group for their university, or satisfies an immediate need, such as funding in the wake of a natural disaster (Bornstein 2012: 36). As this research will highlight, the increasing role that organizations play in providing these services is often conceptualized as a form of empowerment. However, one of the most concerning dangers of diaspora giving is the potential for the philanthropy to become politicized, especially in the case of faith-based organizations that support religious extremism. In relation to the Indian American community, this is a prominent issue; for example, there have been reports linking many Hindu organizations to the flow of funds to

groups that instigated the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002<sup>2</sup> (Geithner et al. 2004: xx).

With the growing influx of funds from overseas, and in light of some of the issues presented above, the Indian government has also attempted to regulate the flow of funds abroad through the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act. This law requires all organizations in India getting funding from foreign sources to register with the government in order to receive such funds. The most recent amendments to this act took effect in 2011, with limitations on dispersing funds directly to individuals and specific requirements for the reporting the receipt of funds over a certain amount (Press Trust of India 2011). The politicization of funding is an issue that will be taken up in the first substantive chapter of this dissertation.

The Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), a policy introduced by the Indian government in 2010 to put in place regulatory parameters for donations from foreign sources, classifies organizations receiving foreign funds into five categories: cultural, economic, educational, religious, and social, with most having a social cause as their purpose, followed by educational. Educational NGOs are controversial because many also have a religious component or religious bias (Kapur et al. 2004: 184). In fact, in many cases, sectarian organizations may disguise their religious bent by classifying themselves as also social (Kapur et al. 2004: 186). The main source of information about foreign inflows to

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<sup>2</sup> This pogrom was especially a “hot button” issue during the 2014 General Election when Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, stood as the BJP’s main candidate for Prime Minister. Modi and the BJP won in a landslide, heavily defeating the Congress Party, and raised Modi to the Prime Minister position. Modi, while never formally charged for a role in the riots, has been seen as responsible for playing a role in facilitating the violence and not preventing or stopping the violence, allowing it to continue for days.

NGOs in India are those maintained by the home ministry through FCRA registration, but it excludes contributions by NRIs, multilateral organizations and bilateral aid agencies (Kapur et al. 2004: 183). Among organizations registered under the FCRA, six states, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, account for nearly three-fourths of the organizations. Three states with a large diaspora, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, have a large number of organizations registered, but two other states with a large diaspora, Gujarat and Punjab, have a small percentage registered of total NGOs in their states, comparatively speaking. For example, Tamil Nadu has over 3,400 FCRA registered organizations, which represents nearly 62% of all of the NGOs in the state, whereas the state of Punjab only has 171 FCRA registered organizations, a share of 21% of the organizations in the state. In Gujarat, 40% of registered NGOs in the state are FCRA certified, in Andhra Pradesh, 61% of the NGOs registered in the state have FCRA clearance, and in Kerala, it is 69%, (FCRA Online Services, Ministry of Home Affairs; NGO Darpan, NITI Aayog).

### **An Overview of the Field: The Indian American Community**

Because of the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the creation of the “Asiatic Barred Zone” with subsequent Immigration Acts in 1914, 1917, and 1924, for the most part, the period between the 1880s and 1960s was largely a period of “restriction and dormancy” for immigration to the United States from India (Bhatt and Iyer 2013: 21).

While the rescinding of the Alien Exclusion Act in 1943 allowed for an increase in immigration from various parts of South Asia, the vast majority of Indian immigrants in the United States came after the 1965 immigration reforms. Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh (2017) argue that immigration to the United States from India occurred in three waves: the

early immigrants who came when Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened up immigration based on skills and family relationships; phase two in the 1980s saw a wave of family members; and finally, about two thirds of the India-born Americans arrived in a third wave, the “IT generation.” This last wave came beginning in the late 1990s, in particular to address concerns over Y2K.

In 1965, immigration laws were liberalized in the United States to allow for students from foreign countries to pursue higher education in the U.S., skilled professionals to emigrate, and allowed for family reunification. Indians were particularly able to take advantage of these shifts because the Indian government had made generous investments in institutions of higher education, particularly engineering colleges. The impetus for these investments was to create an educated group of technocrats to lead industrialization and development in India after Independence (Agarwala 2015a: 90).

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act dramatically changed the demographic of South Asians migrating to the United States, with highly skilled professionals, trained as doctors, engineers, and possessing advanced degrees. These immigrants came to the United States through a very different path from previous waves of immigrants; they were not recruited as laborers, colonial subjects, or refugees of war, and largely came on their own volition and had many of the skills and education that allowed them to be affluent in the first generation (Shankar 1998: xii). Between 1966 and 1977, 83 percent of Indians who immigrated to the United States were highly skilled professionals (Bhatia 2007: 14). The Indian Diaspora, since 1965, tends to be a migration of the “*crème de la crème*” who seek more prosperous futures. With that said though, the diaspora should not be essentialized; they are not homogenous and consist of individuals with various backgrounds, diverse

fears, aspirations, potential, limitations, and agendas (Leung 2008: 289). Another wave of immigration was spurred by the growth of the information technology industry in the 1990s (Kapur et al. 2004: 181). However, the Immigration Act of 1990 imposed stricter demands on employers for labor certification (Prashad 2000: 78), during a time of increasing anti-immigrant sentiment.

In 2015, Indian immigrants in the United States numbered 2.4 million. Of these immigrants, 50% reside in just five U.S. states: California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, and Illinois. Thirty-one percent of Indian immigrants arrived in 2010 or later. Another 31 percent arrived between 2000 and 2009, and 38 percent came before 2000 (US Census, American Community Survey 2015). Indian immigrants are the current largest source of new immigrants to the United States, surpassing Mexican and Chinese immigrants. From 2000 to 2010, the number of Indians living in the region where this study took place grew by 53 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Demographically, this group also stands out in terms of their economic standing and educational backgrounds. Three times more Indian-born residents have college degrees than the general population. In fact, forty percent of Indians over the age of 25 have a degree higher than a bachelor's, compared with 11 percent for the U.S. population (Bhattacharjee 2018: 147). In 2015, 77 percent of Indian adults (ages 25 and over) had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 29 percent of all immigrants and 31 percent of native-born adults. Notably, among college-educated Indian immigrants, more than half had an advanced degree (US Census, American Community Survey, 2015). The educational achievements of Indian Americans are significantly higher than educational attainment

averages in India (Keister and Borelli 2015: 2). In India, less than 8 percent of the population has a college degree (Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh 2017: 67).

But most striking is that their income levels are the single highest of any group in the country and twice that of the general population (Chazen Global insights 2017). The median household income for Indian immigrants in 2015 was much higher than that of the overall foreign and native-born populations; \$107,000, compared to \$51,000 and \$56,000 for overall immigrant and native-born households, respectively. This has led Daves Kapur to ask, "How did the population of one of the world's poorest countries become the richest group in the United States?" (Lecture at University of Pennsylvania, February 13, 2017). Even compared to other Asian American groups, Indian immigrants have higher income and educational levels. Recent research has found that income inequality within the Asian American community is the greatest among any group. The level of inequality has doubled from 1970 to 2016, and the incomes of Asian Americans at the top income levels has increased nine times faster than those near the bottom (Kochhar and Cilluffo 2018).

The participants within this study are reflective of these demographics. All hold bachelor's degrees or higher. Most, except for one respondent who was in graduate school at the time of this research, were employed in high-skilled professional fields, particularly in IT, or had retired from a high-skilled professional occupation. A profile of the different volunteers who were interviewed as part of this research can be seen in Appendix A. As shall be seen later in this dissertation, the opportunities and privileges that come from their socio-economic standing in India and then in the United States shape and influence the ways development is conceptualized but is a dynamic largely unexamined by volunteers.

Indian immigrants are not arriving in the United States as a blank slate. Their successes and passage to the United States is inscribed with the advantages in India that prime them for immigration and success. This relative success, compared to the general US population and other Asian Americans, is due to the “triple selection” process. First, the social system in India creates a small pool of individuals to proceed to higher education. The Indian government has heavily invested into the educational institutions that these individuals enter. This pool consists of those that are urban, educated, and typically from higher or dominant castes. Secondly, the structure of India’s system of examination favors those individuals that go on to higher education for technical fields, such as information technology or engineering, that are in demand in the United States. The final part of this selection process is the migration process to the United States, which is primed to favor immigrants with IT skills (Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh 2017: 67). While this selection process contributes a great deal to ensuring that the immigrants to the United States are successful, this stream also weeds out many others. Due to the distance and cost of travel, immigration was restricted to those who could afford passage. Secondly, because India is a democracy, immigration is not heavily controlled by state mechanisms. Other factors, such as immigrating on work visas at young ages, low divorce rates diminished the number of single-parent households, and finally the ubiquity of the English language primes this group for success in the United States (Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh 2017: 69).

### *Organizing in the Indian American Community*

There is a long history of transnational organizing in the Indian community, dating back to the Hindustan Ghadar Party in 1908, supporting the Independence movement in

India. However, the majority of Indian transnational organizations in the United States started in the last two to three decades. Two tectonic shifts in the last thirty years enabled this. First, the end of the Cold War ended India's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement and ushered in an improvement of relations between the US and India. The second shift was the liberalization of India's economy, opening India to the global market. During the 1990s and early 2000s, an influx of young, educated tech workers were flocking to the United States. With the aftermath of September 11, and increasing prejudice and discrimination towards South Asians in the United States, maintaining transnational ties became a key part of retaining dignity and respect, equivalent to their skills and income (Agarwala 2015a: 92).

The Indian American community generally organizes around linguistic or regional associations, trade or professional organizations that can provide a social and organizational base, religious organizations around places of worships, like a temple, and cultural arts organizations. There are many Indian American organizations that serve specifically the Indian community in the United States, along with a number of umbrella organizations. These range from trade organizations like the Asian American Hotel Owners Association or the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. Together, such groups form the National Federation of Indian American Associations. Gradually, the Indian American community has worked to increase its influence in Washington through political and lobbying groups and the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans. Finally, the community has also sought to increase their influence in Indian affairs, through discussions that occur at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Overseas Indians Celebration) (Sidel 2004: 219). Regional and religious associations also reflect the multiple and overlapping



communities of ethnic origin, creating a “mosaic of affiliation that directly affects philanthropy back to India but is remarkably complex to typologize and analyze” (Sidel 2004: 220). Another growing area of organizing has been philanthropic organizations. As such, the geographic location and purpose of philanthropic giving reflect the preferences of the philanthropists, which are often linked to their sense of identity, familial relationships, social affinities, and traditions of charity (Geithner et al. 2004: xvi).

Because of the growing number of diaspora philanthropic organizations, there is often intense competition between organizations in the United States that raise funds for projects in India. The various organizations involved in transnational philanthropy can be seen as part of an organizational field, comprised of key players in recognized areas of institutional life that produce similar products or services (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 148). Varying levels of competition and collaboration between organizations highlight the role that the environment has in determining decision-making and adaptation in organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 3). Ethnic associations, professional groups, religious organizations, and a number of other voluntary organizations rooted in the community engage in transnational philanthropy activities, in addition to the main function of these organizations to provide services to the Indian American community. This organizational field of groups engaged in transnational philanthropy from the United States to India is also comprised of intermediary organizations like the American India Foundation. Asai, one of the organizations in this study, primarily based in and around university communities and Indian student-scholars, raised \$1 million in 2001 (Sidel 2004: 227). In 2012, the local chapter in this study distributed \$334,293. Most Indian community organizations, at the chapter or local level, have a draw of between 100 and 200 members

with an annual budget in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000. This includes administration or overhead costs, which many of these organizations try to keep at a minimum, and funds distributed to projects in India. On a national level, these organizations may distribute three to four million dollars per year, as in the case of Shikshan, an organization in this study. Asai, another organization in this study, distributed 3.75 million dollars in 2016. A major source of funds for these organizations comes from donations, fundraising events, and targeted fundraising for specific causes or projects.

The amount of giving to non-governmental organizations in the Indian American community has increased in recent years. Social, economic, and political factors have affected and accelerated the growth of civil society in India and have shaped philanthropic practices, leading to a corresponding expansion of philanthropic efforts abroad. While most giving has traditionally been more personal, compared with institutionalized charitable giving in the West, there has been an increase in more organized charitable giving (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004: 263). Despite this growth, many Indian American philanthropists are wary of giving, due to their personal experiences or perceptions of malfeasance within NGOs in India. After the tsunami of December 2004, Indian newspapers were filled with stories of corruption by NGOs and often warned donors to be suspicious (Bornstein 2012: 61).

Another barrier to giving has been the increasing role the Indian government is playing in monitoring funds from abroad. To combat this, Indian-based NGOs have established independent 501(c)(3) intermediaries in the United States to facilitate contributions from the diaspora, focused on regions or cities in the United States where the most high-skilled and high-net worth individuals have settled. There is also the work of

International NGOs like Oxfam and CARE that act as intermediaries to funnel funds to India. Similarly, donor-advised funds, like the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Give2Asia, the Asia Foundation, or the American India Foundation, to manage high-wealth donor money and disperse it to organizations perceived as trustworthy (Geithner et al. 2004: xvii). The American India Foundation (AIF) is one of the most well-known groups and started as a response to relief efforts after the Gujarat earthquakes. AIF interfaces with the Indian national and state governments and, according to AIF, can reduce diaspora frustrations by “quality controlling what the state governments are doing” and collaborating with the government (Sidel 2007: 42). At the same time, there is suspicion of non-profit organizations as well, but personal connections, either relational or a personal interest, often mitigate those suspicions (Bornstein 2012: 63).

The largest areas of giving for the Indian diaspora are health and medicine, education, and disaster relief. These general categories also mask a number of other social issues, such as economic and social inequalities facing the very poor, Dalit or religious minority communities. Most giving from the United States seems to focus on those already benefitting from market reforms and activities related only to a thin layer of India’s population (Sidel 2004: 237). For example, some of the work of Indian American philanthropic organizations is limited in scope, targeting higher education institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology or super-specialized medical institutions, like a diabetes hospital in Hyderabad.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

In the next chapter, I lay out the research methodology used to explore these questions. In this chapter, I will provide an in depth discussions about the three

organizations in this study: how they are structured, how they operate, and what roles volunteers undertake.

Chapter 3, “The Continuum of Development: Politics, Religion, and Secularism in Indian American Philanthropic Organizations,” explores the political spectrum and shades of secularism and religion that characterize each of the organizations in this study. By its very nature, development is a deeply political issue, and this certainly is reflected in the Indian American organizations engaging in philanthropic activities for development work in India. The concept of secularism has long been a hotly contested issue in India, and it is a fraught notion that extends to associational life in the United States. The complexities of these two dynamics, political orientation and the role of religion and secularism, will be important understanding the setting for the voluntary organizations in this study.

In her research on community organizations that specifically served the South Asian American community, Rudrappa (2004), was concerned with the relationship that ethnic organizations had with the larger definition of community and politics, where community was the space that “emerges through our social engagements over the processes of meeting others, negotiating differences, compromising and coming up with collective solutions” (2004: 6). These same questions and concerns apply when looking at organizations that are more transnationally focused.

This chapter will also examine the politics of these organizations and how they frame definitions of development. The contribution of the diaspora to processes of development highlights the ways in which nation-state boundaries have become more fluid in an era of transnationalism, as states adapt to the flow of capital, people, and ideas across borders (Baas et al. 2012: 9). Diaspora engagement, especially in regard to development,

takes several forms, but the most common methods are through trans-local activities of migrant aid associations or top-down attempts by national and international organizations to encourage the involvement of the diaspora in the homeland (Yong and Rahman 2013: 4). Through aid associations, migrants can contribute through volunteerism and philanthropy, which entails devoting time and money to community development projects, providing professional advice and training, and various other voluntary actions as needed in the community served (Yong and Rahman 2013: 10).

Furthermore, in this chapter, I will highlight the characteristics of secularism and Hindu faith-based organizations in India and how this translates to the diaspora. The actions of Hindu organizations have led to responses from and the growth of secular organizations, and a reemphasis on the multicultural and multi-religious environment of India by religious minority groups, like Indian Muslim organizations. The dichotomy between religious and secular, however, is not a clear, distinct divide. The differences between secular and religious are often conceptualized in terms of the perceived differences in their respective frame of references, methodologies, and outcomes. In many cases, notions of what is religious and what is secular overlap and interact with each other (An-Na'im 2005: 411).

The second substantive chapter in this dissertation, Chapter 4, looks at the increasing role of non-state actors, like the voluntary organizations in this research, in funding and addressing development-related issues, specifically education. Indian diaspora organizations in the United States are in a unique position in that they exist at a time when there has been a decline in welfare rights and threats to affirmative action and a greater reliance on non-governmental agencies to step in, in the wake of state attrition (Rudrappa

2004: 6). These are processes that have been seen through decentralization in India and a shift from welfare to “workfare,” with market-based solutions taking the lead in addressing social issues. As a result, the third sector becomes strained with the privatization of a number of governance responsibilities (Rudrappa 2004: 14).

Since the late 1980s, India pursued economic reforms as a means to address a balance of payment problem and stagnant economic growth. With the introduction of economic reforms, the poverty level has decreased slightly, but despite reforms, India still faces severe economic inequalities, human insecurity, and persistent poverty (Geithner et al. 2004: xiv). Furthermore, there are stark differences between regions of the country, along lines of caste, and urban/rural populations. The Indian government’s provision of public goods has greatly diminished. Private schools and high-tech hospitals are accessible only to elites, such that “public provision and private initiative face unresolved problems of inaccessibility, poor quality, and lack of affordability” (Geithner et al. 2004: xv). The 1990s saw a significant shift in development planning to address many of the inequities described above and consider more comprehensive planning for human well-being. Well-being, in this context, is defined as the ability to consume goods and services and the accessibility of the population to the basic necessities for a productive and socially meaningful life. The 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan identified social service delivery as one of the most urgent needs (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004: 262).

The final substantive chapter, “Spaces of Learning and Belonging”, highlights how these organizations model the growing trend of “new philanthropy,” forms of giving that involve more engaged, hands-on modes of volunteerism, not just a monetary gift (Eikenberry 2006: 517). For many volunteers involved with these types of organizations,

there is a desire to be more engaged in the process of giving back, understanding where and how funds are used, and becoming more aware of the social and political issues at play in India, especially related to projects supported by their organization. Eikenberry's work focused on giving circles, where groups convene to support different non-profit causes and discern which organizations receive funding. These organizations resemble a "cross between a book club and an investment group" in which members pool their money together to distribute to various social causes (2006: 518). It is a model of philanthropy that is infused with a degree of civic engagement, allowing members to act within a space to address issues of public concern (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 2). While the members in this study are not necessarily pooling their money together to donate, though many volunteers are also donors, they engage in the same discernment process that giving circles often undertake, analyzing the different programs in India they are funding, understanding the key social issue each program is addressing, the structure of the program, and the budget of the organization. They must become familiar, even if just cursorily, with the different issues affecting projects and engage in the project approval process.

The Conclusion summarizes these findings and highlights the contributions of this dissertation to our understanding of the role the diaspora plays in development. It will also engage in a discussion about the diversity of immigrant organizations in the Indian American community and further areas of research.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The preparation work and research that went into this dissertation took place over a timeframe from January 2013 to August 2016 in a major metropolitan area on the West Coast. During the initial preparation work, I was interested in understanding the field of Indian community organizations. Attending Indian community events, featuring various organizations in the community, helped with gaining access to these organizations and meeting face-to-face with volunteers of those organizations. This created a personal connection that opened doors for further research and collaboration.

Choosing which organizations to study was a task unto itself. Many organizations in the Indian American community, whether they are solely philanthropic or not, engage in transnational projects in India. While regional associations are engaged in activities related to development in India, they primarily serve the purpose of maintaining connections with the state or region of India members are from, hosting events around regional holidays, or hosting classes for children to learn their mother tongue. The particular philanthropic efforts they do engage in are focused on a region or state in India and usually in response to natural disasters. For example, during preliminary fieldwork, an organization I met with, but did not include in this study, focuses their work in the state of Tamil Nadu, since its founders and membership are predominantly from that state. The philanthropic organizations I have chosen to study in this dissertation actively seek to have projects throughout India, rather than focusing on one geographic region. In fact, many of the organizations specifically pointed out that they work in areas of the country that are largely underserved by the diaspora, like Kashmir or Northeast India.



The key distinction I made for this research is that the organizations studied should exist solely to funnel monies to particular projects in India that are related to social services and development, broadly defined. This excludes organizations that are raising funds for religious establishments in India or for services within the Indian American community. To further narrow the field, I chose to look at organizations that are seen as the forerunners in the field of Indian American organizations. The three organizations in this study, which have been given aliases, Asai, Vikas Sangathan, and Shikshan, were some of the first organizations in the Indian American community to facilitate donating to social service programs in India.

This research study was carried out in an area with a high population of Indian Americans on the West Coast. This urban center has attracted a large Indian immigrant population because of employment in the technology sector. The region has had rapid development in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially as economies around the world have shifted from the industrial to the informational age. The Indian community in this metropolitan area has a very vibrant civic life, including a number of regional associations, South Asia-interest organizations, and development and philanthropy groups. For this reason, this location provides a rich source of data related to transnational philanthropy and the Indian community.

### **The Organizations in this Study**

The three organizations in this study have 501(c)(3) status and are therefore tax exempt. Having this distinction can be a financial boost for organizations that operate on limited budgets (Chung 2005: 916). I chose the organizations based on accessibility, their

religious or secular affiliation, and the work of the organizations to address development issues in India. These organizations share several characteristics: they have nationwide chapters, they were founded more than 20 years ago, and the largest chapters of their respective organizations are in the West Coast. In most cases, I had a significant level of access. Becoming a member in these organizations is a fairly open and fluid process. In most cases, one only needs to attend three meetings before one becomes a full member and can vote on issues or projects. I attended meetings and events, to better understand the volunteer experience, and was transparent about my presence as a researcher. Due to geographic distance and exclusivity, board meetings and other governance meetings were not accessible.

### *Asai*<sup>3</sup>

Asai was founded in the 1990s by a group of graduate students. Initially the group met to discuss the use of technology to improve education in India, and ultimately, the group pivoted towards raising funds to support education initiatives in India. To date, Asai has supported more than 400 different projects in 24 states of India. A total of \$32.3 million has been dispersed since Asai's beginnings.

Today, there are currently 37 chapters in the United States. Most of the chapters are organized on university campuses. However, the chapter in this study is not organized around a university campus, though they do collaborate with a nearby collegiate chapter for major events, like annual Holi and Dandiya events that are hosted at the university. The

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<sup>3</sup> An example of some of the projects funded by Vikas Sangathan and Asai can be found in Appendix B.

chapter in this study solicits companies, large donors, and runs a marathon-training program to raise funds. Their funding goes towards education programs across India in both rural and urban settings. There are typically twenty projects funded by the chapter in a one-year cycle.

Asai currently has no paid staff and is governed by a Board of Directors, drawn from the volunteer base, that is elected biennially by the membership across the United States. The national conference, open to all members to attend, happens every other year and is where the new slate of officers is announced. These officers consist of President, Treasurer, and Secretary. The Board of Directors and the Coordination Team, consisting of Chapter Coordinators and other volunteers interested in central governance of the organization, comprise what is called Asai Central. This body is responsible for publishing key organizational documents, like the Annual Report, collecting financial information from the chapters, and managing other non-profit governance issues. For example, many volunteers with Asai stuck to the claim that the organization was “zero overhead,” despite the fact that they incurred costs that qualified as overhead, such as costs for processing online donations, hosting their website, and other administrative costs. Because of the salience of the zero overhead statement, Asai Central, instead of deciding issues such as this unilaterally, sent the matter for chapters to vote on whether or not to continue using the claim that the Asia was a “zero overhead” organization. The voting at the chapter level actually led to discussions within the chapter meeting about what overhead in a non-profit actually is and how it is accounted. In the case of the statement about financial overhead, Asai shifted their annual report and donation statements to reflect that a small percentage

of funds, 4%, are used for fundraising and administration, but otherwise, all other funds support projects.

Another key role played by Asai Central is vetting any new partnerships for Asai. Often, these are projects or NGOs with which current volunteers have a connection. On Asai's website, there is a form that can be filled out for any program seeking funds that fit Asai's goal to support education-related projects in India. The three major guidelines for projects is that they should have no political or religious affiliation, must not discriminate on caste, creed, religion, or sex, and must improve the general welfare of the community through education. This does not mean, however, that there are not projects that specifically focus on marginalized groups, like Dalits, *Adivasis*, or school-aged girls. The projects partners are usually education facilities run by non-profit organizations in India. Proposals from these organizations may seek to fund a specific program, like instructional training for teachers, a school run specifically for *Adivasis*, or full funding for any instructional or education program related expenses. Asai does not provide any infrastructure support. Once Asai Central vets these projects, they will notify chapters that this project is looking for funding, at which point, those chapters that can take on new projects disseminate it to their chapters to find a volunteer to work with the contact in India.

At the chapter level, the chapters are led by a Chapter Coordinator. The Chapter Coordinator's main tasks are to communicate any policy changes or decisions from Asai Central and run the meetings. Alongside them, a Projects Coordinator acts as a project manager for the various programs getting financial support from the chapter. Other officer positions were for specific chapter programs. Other key chapter officer positions were the

coordinators for two fundraising campaigns, Work An Hour, where donors give the equivalent of their hourly salary, and Support a Child, where someone can donate the equivalent of a child's education costs for a year. A third coordinator, the Biking and Marathon Training Coordinator, oversees the other major fundraising initiative for Asai, their bike and marathon training program. This program requires registered runners and bikers to raise a minimum amount of funds. This model has been adapted from other non-profit organizations that run marathon or triathlon training programs. The training program runs parallel to the chapter, with only a couple of volunteers involved with both the chapter work and the training program. At least once a year, the chapter hosted a fundraiser concert, usually featuring an Indian fusion band traveling to the United States. Asai's other major public fundraiser was an annual Dandiya celebration, a music and dance event.

Membership into the organization is a fairly straightforward process. Once an individual has attended three meetings, they become a full voting member. Many people deepen their engagement with the organization by becoming a Project Steward, working directly with contacts in India to collect information about the work they are doing, learn more about their needs, and vet how funding will be used. As will be seen later in this dissertation, some volunteers work very closely with these contacts for a long time and develop substantive relationships with their contacts.

Meetings for this chapter took place every Wednesday evening, in a volunteer's home. Each meeting focuses mostly on reviewing projects that are being funded by the chapter, with Project Stewards sharing the organization's proposal, answering questions from the volunteers at the meeting, and collecting feedback and questions as follow up for

the project partner. Typically, presenting a project would span over two weeks. At the conclusion of presenting and getting answers to questions volunteers had, the chapter votes on whether or not to fund the project at the level proposed by the organization. For those unable to attend the meeting, the notes are uploaded to an online platform or shared on a listserv, and voting can also be done online. Once an affirmative vote is given to a project, the Project Steward then logs into a centralized platform to submit documentation, such as proof of non-profit status and registration to receive foreign contributions, so that the funds can then be disbursed to India. Initially, only half of the funds are disbursed. After a six-month review of the project during one of the chapter meetings, the additional funds are released. In 2017, this chapter raised over \$471,000 dollars, and at the time of this research, it supported 22 projects and was slated to disburse about \$580,000 in 2018.

### *Vikas Sangathan*

Vikas Sangathan was also founded in 1990s by a group of graduate students at a US university . The group started as a discussion group on poverty issues and delved further into religious fundamentalism and sectarianism in India. The group felt that they needed to go beyond mere conversations and act. On Indian Independence Day (August 15) in 1991, the students sent out a mailer asking people to donate a minimum of \$10 to support building schools in India. Eventually the group moved beyond focusing on education and “decided it was a good idea to tackle all the problems, as they are all interconnected” (Interview with Santosh, May 30, 2015).

Many of Vikas Sangathan’s chapters are university-based, though this particular chapter is not based in a university. At the time of this research, the organization was

attempting to make in-roads to attract more student volunteers from a nearby university. Vikas Sangathan works on a variety of issues, with this chapter adopting a special focus on environmental education and activism. They also engage in educational funding, among other areas of focus. Currently, there are 36 chapters of Vikas Sangathan in the United States supporting about 100 ongoing projects and 2 major campaigns. Vikas Sangathan's projects span a number of spheres, including education, livelihood support, sustainable agriculture, social justice initiatives, health, women's rights, environmental and ecological projects, and programs highlighting the usage of the Right to Information Act, to request government records and hold the state accountable.

Vikas Sangathan has two paid staff members. One is located in the East Coast and the other staff member splits their time between the United States and India. These were positions started only in 2012, with the second added in 2014. Both coordinators who were hired had been long-term volunteers with Vikas Sangathan; one of them, in fact, had been a founding member of the organization. The Development Coordinators are chiefly responsible for driving fundraising and ensuring chapter effectiveness, which includes providing organizational support to chapter officers, training for volunteers, and addressing any difficulties facing the chapters, in relation to volunteer retention or fundraising.

Along with these paid staff members, Vikas Sangathan has a Board of Directors, and an Executive Board. The Board of Directors is comprised of long-serving volunteers who have also served on the Executive Board. They are elected to the board by the current-serving Board of Directors, with no specified term limits but are given a vote of confidence every four years of service. Most of their decision-making power is related to governance

issues, similar to the function of a traditional non-profit board. Working closely with them, the Executive Board is comprised both of appointed and elected officials. Members on this board serve two year terms; the Executive Board addresses treasury issues, organizational publications like newsletters and the annual report, fundraising, and coordinating between chapters and the central governance structure.

Through a Vikas Sangathan-wide listserv, individual volunteers can receive information about policies affecting Vikas Sangathan partners in India and updates on when partners from India will be coming to the US so that chapters can schedule that person to come and speak to their volunteers or give a public talk. This listserv served as the easiest way for volunteers across the country to coordinate on fundraising events, stay informed on important policy action taking place in India, and take part in update calls with key partners in India.

At the chapter level, an Executive Committee provides leadership. These positions include President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. This executive committee interfaces with both the Board of Directors and the Executive Board to inform them of the performance of the chapter, any challenges they are facing, and reporting out on the projects and non-profit partners that the chapter is working with. Within each chapter, there is an Overall Projects Coordinator who tracks the lifecycle of the different NGO projects being funded in India and ensures that projects have a volunteer assigned to steward that project.

As with Asai, membership in Vikas Sangathan is very open, with volunteers becoming voting members after attending three meetings if they are a new volunteer or three of the last six meetings if they have lapsed in their participation. The chapter



meetings are called Community Service Hours (CSH), and for the chapter in this research, meetings take place every ten days, with meetings taking place mostly in a volunteer's home, in a classroom or meeting space at the local university, or in a meeting space provided by a local progressive organization. The meetings would cover project reviews, advocacy campaigns, chapter administration, and any fundraising work. Vikas Sangathan has a marathon training program, but runners in this program are not required to raise a minimum amount, just a suggested amount. The chapter hosts an annual fundraising dinner, inviting the founders of the organization to share with their top donors, drives fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns around national holidays like Republic Day and Independence Day, and multiple concerts, featuring contemporary Indian artists and fusion bands, mixing classical and popular Indian music with rock or folk music. Vikas Sangathan also runs a major fundraising campaign at the end of the year to draw attention to various projects funded by Vikas Sangathan. Like many US non-profits, they hope to take advantage of donors wishing to donate before the end of the year for tax purposes.

Volunteers can often choose to work with non-profit partners based on their specific interests in topic areas such as health, environmental issues, or women's rights. Based on information from the non-profit partner in India, volunteers have to submit a draft proposal, which will be discussed at a CSH. At the CSH, the Project Coordinator will collect feedback and questions to share with their contact in India. At the next CSH, responses from the project partners to the questions from the volunteers will be presented and the project then voted upon. Much of the key documentation about the non-profit partners are not handled by the volunteers, unless it is a new partnership, in which case, the volunteer in contact with the organization requests documentation, like audited

financials and proof of their non-profit status. Volunteers upload these items onto Vikas Sangathan's project portal the meeting minutes, including the vote outcome, and presentation given to the chapter. Once these materials are submitted, the Overall Project Coordinator for the chapter passes submits the request for funds, with the accompanying documentation, to Treasurer of Vikas Sangathan to then approve the funds to be disbursed to India. The full amount of funds approved are sent at one time. There is a six month check in that takes place, but this is more to notify the chapter of what is happening with the funded project. At the time of this research, the chapter supported 15 projects. As compared to Asai, Vikas Sangathan's reporting on finances is not as robust. In 2015, the most recent record available, the chapter of Vikas Sangathan in this study raised \$132,269 in donations. Across the whole organization, in 2016, Vikas Sangathan's chapters in the United States raised a total of \$2,276,912. Unfortunately, there are no financial documents that break this up by local chapters.

### *Shikshan*

Shikshan was started in the 1980s and had originally been a program started by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)<sup>4</sup> in India to create schools for educating *Adivasis*, India's indigenous population, in remote areas of India. The organization acknowledges its VHP beginnings and its Hindu bias, but continues to assert that they no longer have formal ties

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<sup>4</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad is a right-wing Hindu group formed by senior leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1964 to provide Hindus with a "clearly defined sense of religious identity and political purpose" (Rao 2002).

with the VHP. Today, the organization claims to have a presence in over 70,000 villages throughout India. Within the United States, they have 70 chapters.

The schools supported by Shikshan follow a model called “one teacher schools,” where one teacher provides education for all the children in an area where schooling may be inaccessible. Many scholars and activists have been critical of the approach of such schools because of the degree to which these schools debase tribal cultures and impose hegemonic Hindu values. Hindu organizations have promoted the reconversion of *Adivasis* and those who have converted from Hinduism to escape the caste system, despite the lack of a tradition of conversion in Hinduism (Clarke 2008: 30). These are reconversions with a “civilizing mission,” imbued with the ‘Brahmanical great tradition of’ of nationalistic Hinduism, and neglects the “little traditions of Hinduism” (Hansen 1999: 107). This agenda of reconversion has been part of a larger push to create a more hegemonic Hinduism.

Shikshan has one full-time staff member, and a few part-time employees that handle the financial aspects of the organization, such as preparing tax documentation and preparing for audits. The full-time staff member has been given the title of Executive Director and constantly travels to different Shikshan chapters to host fundraising trainings and discuss strategies for gaining more visibility in the community. Funds raised by Shikshan in the United States are funneled to two organizations: Friends of Tribal Society and Bharat Lok Shiksha Parishad. These two organizations will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

Unlike Asai and Vikas Sangathan, Shikshan’s volunteer base focuses strictly on fundraising and networking with high-net worth individuals in the Indian American community. Shikshan’s main fundraiser event is an annual concert, which usually features

playback singers from the Hindi film industry, but in the most recent concert, Shikshan school alumnae who had been selected in a national competition performed. Volunteers work to get sponsorships for these events, predominantly from small businesses or entrepreneurs in the Indian American community, and sell tables and tickets, from which proceeds go to Shikshan. Given this singular purpose, the volunteers do not have to undertake a lot of the work that is done in Vikas Sangathan and Asai. Instead, volunteers focus their time on fundraising for the organization or organizing public forums. Other fundraising events include smaller events held within someone's home, birthday fundraisers, or fundraisers linked to cultural events, such as an *arangetram*, the debut dance for a student of Bharatanatyam dance, or a religious holiday. Many of the public forums hosted by Shikshan are panels discussing the intersection of education with technology, and feature major Indian American philanthropists and representatives from startup companies focused on education technology.

The most recent financial statements for Shikshan, from their 2017 Annual Report, shows that across the United States, the organization raised over \$6.8 million dollars and distributed more than \$7.3 million. Unfortunately, their financial records do not delineate the fundraising efforts by chapter.

### **Conducting the Research**

The chapters in this research are among the largest, in terms of membership, and in terms of total giving to India each year. All of these organizations are also nationally organized with chapters located across the United States. Therefore, choosing to conduct

this research on the West Coast was key for understanding how chapters worked, given the robustness of their work.

This study uses a Grounded Theory framework of analysis, allowing for theoretical contexts to arise out of the data collected for this study. I triangulated data collection methods, incorporating evidence from interviews, archival and online-based documents for the organizations, emails on organizational listservs, and participant-observation at organizational meetings and events. These sources helped provide historical information about the chapters and how they are governed. For each of the organizations, I joined as a volunteer, but I also made my presence as a researcher known and did not use any deception. As such, conversations about my research often came up before or at the end of organizational meetings, which I also attended as a part of this research. In addition to meetings and events at the chapter level, I attended the national conferences for two of the organizations, Asai and Vikas Sangathan. At these conferences, informal conversations with the founders of the organization provided invaluable background information about how the organizations started and their original intent on starting the organizations. Detailed notes were taken of these informal conversations, as well as of the proceedings, and recordings of the sessions were available.

Narrative interviews with volunteers helped shed light on the contemporary issues facing the organizations, volunteers' own trajectories within the organization, personal histories of volunteering, and impressions of what development means in the context of the work they are doing with the organization. Within these organizations, my original intention was to interview 15 people per organization. However, over the course of this research, it became apparent that all of the organizations had a core group of six to seven

dedicated volunteers and a much larger cadre of volunteers that were not as engaged, or they were just engaged with specific projects or events. Therefore, over the course of this research, I interviewed 32 participants: 10 with Vikas Sangathan, 12 with Asai, 10 with Shikshan. In the cases of Vikas Sangathan and Asai, one of the interviews was with one of the founders of the organization, all others were with chapter volunteers. All the interviews with Shikshan were with chapter volunteers. A list of these interviewees can be seen in Appendix A. All participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. These interviews were voice recorded, and ranged from 45 minutes for the shortest interview to two and a half hours for the longest interview. Most interviews were an hour to an hour and a half long. A sample of the questions asked during these interviews can be seen in Appendix C.

I directly solicited volunteers for this research through emails to the chapter and making announcements at chapter meetings. A few volunteers came forward through this method. I also utilized purposive sampling to specifically target those volunteers that were involved with the leadership of the chapter and those that were major contributors in chapter meetings and events. I identified those that were active at the meetings as those that attended multiple meetings over the course of a few months, participated frequently in chapter discussions, or acted as project stewards for more than one project. In addition to these volunteers, I also interviewed those that had just joined the chapters. Their interviews provided insights into the motivations for why someone joins the organization.

All of the volunteers in this research, except for 4 volunteers from Shikshan, immigrated to the United States from India. Two of the four volunteers from Shikshan were of Indian origin, born in the United States, one had been born in Hong Kong but moved to

the United States at a young age, and the fourth volunteer was born and raised in England. Of the volunteers that emigrated from India, all but eleven initially came to the United States on an F-1 or Student Visa, to pursue studies in graduate school. Of the eleven that did not take this path, seven came on H1-B or work visas and four immigrated because of marriage. One major characteristic of these organizations is that most of the volunteer base is male. I interviewed at least three female volunteers from each organization.

As will be seen, these interviews help highlight personal motivations for participation, how individuals conceptualize development, and what engaging in this work means to them and their relationship to India. These interviews allowed me to uncover “deep understandings” (Bhatia 2007: 61) about their perceptions of development, how it has been shaped by their involvement, and what meanings are produced through their engagement in these organizations. Interviews also helped uncover the sense of self and identity and their link to specific language used to make sense of different phenomena, such as culture, and capture various and conflicting representations that an individual may have of their individual and collective life space (Bhatia 2007: 61).

In addition to interviews, I gathered participant-observation data by attending meetings of these three organizations, public events that they hosted, or community events at which they were a co-sponsor or had an informational booth. Many of these latter events were Indian community-wide events, like celebrations for Indian Independence Day. These observations proved helpful in providing a better understanding of the workings of the organizations and shed light on the overall message the organization is portraying about its work in India. Chapter meetings helped highlight the fundamental debates taking place among volunteers. Fundraising events highlighted how organizations framed themselves

and their mission for the public, which often tends to be a predominantly Indian audience. Concerts were the most common fundraiser hosted by these organizations, often featuring Indian fusion artists, in the case of Asai and Vikas Sangathan, and more traditional devotional music or classic Bollywood/Hindi cinema singers with Shikshan. Additionally, the organizations would often host talks for the community featuring project partners from India. In the case of the concerts and the talks, these events would rotate to multiple chapters, with the costs of travel to the US and being in the US shared among the chapters hosting the speaker or performance group.

Lastly, this research drew upon electronic resources. These organizations cannot survive without being tech savvy, whether it is to provide a platform for the organization's message or to collect donations. I was able to gain access to archival and online-based documents by being a volunteer with these organizations. Each of these organizations had wikis or used a cloud-based document sharing program, where volunteers are given access to information and documentation. YouTube videos of organization events, emails sent out discussing funded projects, or communications specific to organizational operations, either on a listserv or through a wiki and the organization's website – all these electronic resources were extensively utilized by these organizations to enable easier coordination between volunteers and aid in communications with project partners in India take place over this media. Such communications also allowed for flexibility so that organization members can stay engaged with what is happening when they are not able to attend meetings, due to travel or other obligations. As will be seen in a later chapter, this online archive serves as an institutional memory for the organizations.



## *My Position as a Researcher*

The question of what development means, especially in the context of India, has been a discussion I have had with friends and colleagues over a number of years. Perhaps what was most striking to me would be comments made during long road trips from sleepy college towns to large cities: how can India have the same development as the US? Development, in this case, meant large highways, skyscrapers, and infrastructure. The way these international students from India looked at the development in the United States raised questions in my mind of what then development in India would look like for them. This prodded me to look more deeply into the central questions of this dissertation.

As a White, middle class woman, native born to the United States, engaging in self-reflexivity in relation to this study of the Indian American community is of imperative importance. This “bending back on itself” (Steier 1991, 2) is important to understand my relationship to the participants in this study, especially to understand power, privileges and biases. During the course of this research, I was employed with a research center focused on South Asia at a local university. This affiliation helped me gain access to these organizations. Additionally, I had made several trips to India for research and to learn Hindi. I also have a personal connection with India; my spouse is from Chennai, and I had learned Tamil as well. This all helped to provide a base from which I could build rapport with my respondents and engage in deeper conversations about the relationship they had to India, what led them to get involved in their organizations, and their personal experiences with volunteering and beyond. Additionally, I became a volunteer with each of the three organizations in this dissertation, which helped me to meet and get to know other

volunteers better and allowed me to see firsthand what the experience of a volunteer is in each of these organizations. I was transparent about my research before starting to regularly volunteer with the organizations. By building rapport and becoming a volunteer with these organizations, a number of off the record conversations at events and other gatherings helped provide further insights that assisted in the research for this dissertation.

### *Ethical Considerations*

One key ethical consideration with this research is the participants' emotional responses to this research. The network of organizations and people that I was working with are closely connected, and therefore, individuals might have shared with other potential research participants their experience of the research. In the case of Bhatia's research (2007) on Indian identity formation in the United States, participants spoke with other potential participants about the interview, reporting that it was "hard" and made them "think about their life in America," (65), which made some participants reluctant to take part in the research. Fortunately, in the course of this research, many participants were happy to talk about their experiences volunteering with these organizations. Though, in a few cases, there were interviewees who shared frustrations they had with the organizations and their time as a volunteer. Perhaps many participants were eager to share because they took pride in their work as volunteers, and for some, they devoted a great deal of time and energy volunteering with their chosen organization. Their participation was a significant part of their life.

### *Limitations*

At the outset of this research, I had also intended to study an Indian Islamic group engaging in transnational philanthropic work. While there is an organization in the same geographic space raising funds for various projects in India, recruiting participants to be part of this research proved to be difficult. More so than the organizations in this research, this Islamic organization had a much larger professional staff and utilized volunteers only for event planning. Future iterations of this research should make efforts to include Islamic groups into their analysis of philanthropy for development work. Another interesting trend with this organization, as compared to its other counterparts in the Indian community, was that its support base was more pan-South Asian. In the few interviews I had conducted or interactions with supporters at a fundraising dinner, I spoke with many people that were from Bangladesh or Pakistan. They cited their reason for involvement in an Indian Muslim organizations was because of a shared culture, but they also cited a concern for the welfare of Muslims in India. This exclusion is unfortunate and would certainly be a dynamic to explore in future research.

### *Significance of this Research*

In proportion to the remittances sent through families, collective remittances or philanthropy through immigrant organizations are much smaller, but they are on the rise. And as they grow more prominent, it is important to understand the ways in which they can lead the way in directing remittances to highly needed and effective forms of development (Vertovec 2012: 89). Philanthropic organizations, in the end, become one way in which migrants feel they can effect change in their home countries from abroad. The key part of this research is to better understand the dynamic of these organizations and the work they do.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTINUUM OF DEVELOPMENT: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND SECULARISM IN INDIAN AMERICAN PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS

Immigrants set up organizations as a means to express and maintain collective identity. There are a number of factors that stimulate the formation of ethnic organizations: cultural differences vis-à-vis the native population, level of resources among the members of the immigrant group, and the pattern of migration (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 825). Joining community organizations is one means by which immigrants find a space of community and belonging. These organizations are part of a larger transnational social field which includes migrant-led membership organizations and public institutions. These institutions function in different areas of public spaces, like cultural or political gatherings and other organizational forms (Fox and Bada 2008: 443). Within this community of organizations, each organization engages in “a deliberate effort to define and voice a social identity that represents at least one segment of the immigrant community” (Agarwala 2015: 7). This chapter investigates the ways that this segmentation takes place between the organizations in this study. As will be seen, the politics of the homeland influences the lines drawn between diasporic organizations. Politics, in this context, can be understood as practices that seek to be representative of society, making reality a political imaginary through rites, spectacles, laws, and institutions (Hansen 1999: 28).

The politics of these organizations becomes further complicated because of their work in the field of development. In the context of the Indian American community, the politics of development and the overlay of secularism and religion play a pivotal role in the ways the organizations set agendas and the ways in which they engage with their partners

in India. To better understand these dynamics, we must first understand the articulations of secularism within an Indian and Indian American context and history of Hindu identity politics. Religion plays a role in the general orientation of the organizations and their development paradigm.

Because of centuries-old conflicts that have polarized different religious groups in India, some Indian immigrants choose to engage in organizations that are defined as secular, pan-Indian associations. In many cases, these associations aim to not engage in activities or take positions that might indicate support or opposition to religious causes (Bretell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 112). An example of this can be seen in the actions of the India Association of North Texas, which raised funds for relief efforts after the earthquake in Gujarat in the early 2000s but made no statement and took no action after the Hindu-Muslim violence in the same state in 2002 (Bretell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 113). Should such silence be interpreted as a principled stance of neutrality or as tacit support of this violence?

### **Secularism in an Indian American Context**

Secularism, in the past century and a half, has arisen as a particular ideological formation and set of “legal, cultural, and political practices” that define modern democratic societies (Cady and Hurd 2010: 4), but also entails the “impartiality of the state” and the “guarantee of religious and confessional pluralism and atheism” (Göle 2010: 44).

Secularism is understood as a principle of the separation of state and religion and underpins the state-building process, lawmaking, and popular sovereignty. However, there are multiple types of secularisms influenced by different national, cultural, and religious

contexts (Göle 2010: 41). According to the Constitution of India, secularism is the equitable treatment of different religious communities by the state. In a sense, it is a form of principled distance in which the state may “connect or disconnect with religion” dependent on “whether the values to which they are committed are promoted or undermined by one or the other way of relation to religion” (Bhargava 2010: 162). Therefore, the form that secularism in India takes is one in which “there is acceptance that all religions are meaningful and that they should have a valid place in the life of the nation” but that “religion is not a component in defining nationality or citizenship” (Tambiah 2004: 422). Transnational right-wing Hindu organizations and political parties that define India as a Hindu nation have directly challenged secularism in India.

### **Religion and Organizing in Immigrant Communities**

Religion has played a major role in philanthropic giving in India. Many religious traditions have social giving engrained as a doctrine, whether it is *dān* or *dakshina* in Hinduism, *bhiksha* in Buddhism, or *zakaat* in Islam (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004: 263). Within Islam and Christianity, there are institutionalized systems to ensure faith-members contribute a portion of their income to charity. In Hinduism, there is no official tithe, but *dān* (giving) is part of one’s *dharma* (duty) and includes selfless service (*sewa*) and giving that is non-reciprocal or one-sided and not motivated by self-interest. It is a “pure gift” that is voluntary with no expectations of return (Parry 1989: 66; Anand 2003: 9). The gift, for the giver, is a form of sacrifice in a symbolic manner, with a unilateral flow to a worthy recipient that gives the gift merit meant to cleanse and purify oneself (Parry 1986: 460). The idea of *dān* and *sewa* was later interpreted by Gandhi to be social gifts for general

welfare. In this interpretation, the gift was still pure, but the benefit of the transfer was for the ultimate transformation of the world (Juergensmeyer and McMahon 1998: 268). The organizations in this study go a step further, where utility is derived from donating and volunteering. Giving and volunteering reflect a mix of pure and impure altruism.

Many Western governments and NGOs have underestimated the role of religion in people's lives, especially in non-Christian contexts. There has been a failure to develop a tool to fully analyze religious groups and the work they do in development contexts, especially on human rights issues and equitable development (Balchin 2007: 535). Clarke has argued that in a country like India, where the caste system is central to social construction of poverty and derives much of its legitimacy from religious discourses, the connections between faith and development are accentuated (2008: 39) and often essentialized and misunderstood by Western organizations. Religion provides motivations and resources for civic engagement; such resources include community participation, network of like-minded individuals, and an articulation of community needs (Ecklund et al. 2013: 375).

The links between religion and development have largely been ignored as development practitioners have tended to adhere to secularization theory and the idea that as societies modernize, religious institutions would lose significance (Clarke 2008: 17). In India, this has hardly been the case. Religiously motivated philanthropy, especially from diaspora communities, has provided key financial resources for religious and ethnic political forces, such as the Sikh separatist movement in the 1980s or the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a political party (Juergensmeyer and McMahon 1998: 263).

These tensions are at the heart of this first substantive chapter, which explores the religious and political spectrum on which these organizations exist.

Religious transnationalism is identity-based, organized both formally and informally around religion, and connects migrants to their homelands through economic, social, and political networks. Many religious movements or organizations also move beyond just maintaining religious identity and engage in transnational projects to reconstruct and reinvent religious identities. These organizations can also be transmitters of remittances, both economic and social, that may support development and poverty reduction among co-religionists in the homeland (Singh et al. 2010: 11). Religious organizations are a prominent feature of the organizational field in immigrant communities. The connection between religion and ethno-national identity represents an important motivating factor for immigrants to join religious organizations. Religion can serve as a means for separate associational structures within the same national group and may lead to associational segregation (Moya 2005: 846). These particular organizations gain prominence because of the stresses associated with immigration. Through this associational life, immigrants have embraced new homelands and at the same time, retained faith identities and familial ties to their countries of origin. Religious identity, through practice, comes to form a key component of cultural identity, especially as a process of reaction to cultural and religious otherness (Vertovec 2000: 35).

### **Political Hinduism**

Religious fundamentalism and right-wing extremism have often been studied separately, but within the Indian context, the overlap between the two phenomena is



uncanny. By looking at it as just a right-wing movement makes it a problem of secularism and removes the religious undertones of such a movement. Focusing on the religious aspects of a movement removes the linkages it has to wider political implications and struggles (Bermanis, Canetti-Nisim and Pedahzur 2004: 160). The linkages become even stronger between these two phenomena when these ideas are linked with nationalism and have a synergistic effect in the diasporic community.

*Hindutva*, as a philosophy, arose during the 1920s from the question of “who is a Hindu” in an attempt to define the future Indian nation after British colonialism. Hinduism, by this definition, became defined as inclusive of those religions that were “native” to India, as an attempt to create a sense of national unity around culture, religion, and language (Jaffrelot 2008: 241). In this view, India is and will always be Hindu, in a civilizational sense, with Muslims and non-Hindus being “culturally alien” (Hansen 1999: 11). This nation-spirit has been attractive to Hindu nationalists, advocating for the assimilation of minorities through acculturation, supporting hierarchical relations of caste, and dominated by Brahmanical values (Jaffrelot 2008: 242). This definition of who is a Hindu is separated from the history of the term and ignores the various indigenous religions that existed in India at the time of European colonization that were later denigrated and excluded. Hindu, originally, referred to those that lived in the South Asian subcontinent, south of the Indus River. It was a geographic term, created by orientalist, scholars, missionaries, and colonial administrators as a territorial marker (Hansen 1999: 65).

The ideology of *Hindutva* has been a key point of organizing for groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has pursued social programs for tribal groups in India (Jaffrelot 2008: 243), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) the largest and most

active organization of Hindus worldwide, with close ties to temples and local organizing. For many years, the RSS was banned in India due to its role in the assassination of Gandhi. However, the RSS and its associated organization the VHP became active overseas in the 1950s and 1960s to maintain cultural links between Indians abroad and their homeland. Seeing an opportunity to expand their resources, new groups spun off that did not advertise their ideological affiliations with the RSS. This created opportunities for those who had succeeded abroad to give back to India (Jaffrelot 2008: 255). The “social welfare strategy” adopted by the RSS seeks to “assimilate marginal populations which are naturally appreciative of charitable work, into the Hindu nation” (Jaffrelot 2008: 245). This creates what Mukta (2000) calls the “familiar-familial” space, wedding liberal representation to mask the militant nature of the Hindu Right and a lack of critical engagement by those that come into the fold of these organizations (455). At the same time, they seek to reform mentalities to reflect high caste ideals and live disciplined lives. This is accomplished largely through a number of schools run by the service branch of the RSS, Seva Bharati (Jaffrelot 2008: 246). Likewise, the activities of the VHP and VHP-associated organizations deal with questions of religious identity, media images of the community, support community-building among Hindus, and address the perceived problem of conversions from Hinduism to Islam or Christianity (Katju 2005: 429; Therwath 2005).

Hindu nationalism in India is linked to programs of economic liberalization and fear of outsiders. Within the United States, Hindu nationalism has also become linked to cultural reproduction and maintaining Hindu values (Bornstein 2012: 38). *Hindutva* forces in the United States gained further traction in the 1980s and 1990s when the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power after winning national elections, after many years of rule by the

Congress party, which had branded itself as a more centrist, secular political party. Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad argue that the Hindu Right in the United States has taken on a form they label as “Yankee *Hindutva*,” operating in the confines of a multicultural society and seeking to attract people from all walks of life but also exact social control over Indian Americans (2000: 516). The growth of Hindu nationalist parties in India held tremendous appeal to the Indian immigrants in the United States (Das Gupta 2006: 183). In the early 2000s, tensions existed between *Hindutva* forces in the United States and counter-movements mobilized against the religious right, often from Indian American groups on college and university campuses. While there are a number of progressive organizations attempting to create an alternative voice, they have not made a dent in the support for *Hindutva* in the United States (Kurien 2001: 267; Prashad 1998: 112).

The various Hindu nationalist forces, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political wing, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the organizational wing of *Hindutva*, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, all promote a majority communalism that, at its roots, makes a homogenous Hindu identity coterminous with the nation of India (Rajan and Needham 2006: 16). These forces also identify four categories as being enemies of India: followers of so-called foreign religions, particularly Christianity and Islam; Communists; Westernized members of the Indian intelligentsia; and foreign powers. The upper class Indian elites are viewed as being de-Hinduized and responsible for the degradation and decline of Indian society towards more Western culture and values (Tambiah 2004: 435) which further polarizes the distinction made between the religious and the secular in the Indian polity. The conflict between Hindu and secular ideologies is important to understand in regard to the work of these various organizations. The actions of Hindu organizations have taken

place in a period that has seen an eclipsing of the state, with nationalism being not just within geographic boundaries, but being initiated and orchestrated by immigrant communities living outside of their homelands (Kurien 2001: 264). In the Indian diaspora, *Hindutva* is particularly strong among highly educated, highly professional groups, which Kurien explains as being a response to both immigrant marginalization and a resource for ethnic solidarity. Participating in such organizations helps bring recognition and status from fellow immigrants and compensates for loss of status in host societies but also helps in gaining recognition and political rights in the host country. These rights are related to “vernacular notions of citizenship,” the claiming of special rights, representation, and cultural autonomy that differs from unitary models of citizenship (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 3).

Fundraising in the diaspora for Hindu political causes in India was sparked in the early 1990s with the campaign to build a temple to Ram, a Ram Mandir, on the site of a Mughal mosque, the Babri Masjid. Indians from abroad, in a symbolic and political gesture, were solicited to purchase bricks towards building this temple. It is estimated that between December 1992 and January 1993, at least \$350,000 was sent from the United States to India in support of the *Hindutva* movement (Kurien 2001: 285, citing a study by Prashad 1997). The 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid propelled the BJP onto a national and international scene (Kurien 2001: 268). Perhaps the most alarming example was the use of funds raised by the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) to funnel money directly to Sangh-affiliated groups, under the guise of development-related work in India, raising over \$2 million from 1990 to 1998. The role of Hindu right wing groups was obscured by the multiple levels of organizations through which the money passed and due to the countless

number of offshoots that exist (Jaffrelot and Therwath 2007: 288). A strong linkage showed that funds sent by IDRF to India in support of disaster relief efforts was sent to groups that later instigated violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. IDRF was heavily scrutinized in a report entitled “The Campaign to Stop Funding Hate,” which shed further light on their connection to Hindu right groups. The report led many high-tech companies, like Cisco, Oracle and Sun Microsystems, who gave funds by matching employee giving, to remove IDRF from their list of approved organizations (Krishnaswami, Nov. 22, 2002). Despite the fallout from IDRF’s practices, many Hindu organizations in India and the United States have begun to engage in direct poverty alleviation efforts, in part to deflect from the negative attention given to Hindu organizations for raising funds to support violence against religious minorities. Some organizations have gone as far as to classify themselves as development organizations (Agarwala 2015a: 94).

### **The Intersection of Religion and Politics with Development**

At its inception, the BJP’s approach to economic policy was divided between the desire to achieve high-growth, through high-tech, capitalist growth and the desire to emphasize *swadeshi*<sup>5</sup>-oriented development to protect Indian industries (Hansen 1999: 172). While the BJP received greater support as a result of the Ram Mandir campaign, capitalizing on the notion of Hindu loss, electoral defeats in 1993 signaled that a shift was needed in the BJP’s policies, beyond invoking ethno-nationalism. They scaled down their dependence on religious symbolism and steered towards a diversified strategy (Hansen

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<sup>5</sup> *Swadeshi* literally means one’s own country, but within the BJP’s economic policy, it meant the protection of the Indian market and industry and promoting domestic goods against the forces of economic globalization (Lakha 2002: 83).

1999: 198). Even more so, the BJP sought to benefit from the failures of the Congress Party, particularly around the issues of corruption, inflation, and factionalism, and introduced a more populist platform, claiming to be “the party with a difference” (Jaffrelot 1993: 538). The BJP argued that the centralized planning under Nehru gave rise to corruption, economic inefficiency, and suppression of entrepreneurship (Nayar 2000: 798). Included in these policy shifts was a greater focus on limiting the state’s involvement in the economy and highlighting the success of economic reforms, a policy shift that greatly appealed to the urban middle class (Chhibber and Verma 2014: 50). Furthermore, as a counter to the liberalization policies of the Congress Party, which had been a plank of the BJP’s platform, the BJP argued for a more nuanced liberalization, with limitations on foreign companies in the consumer goods sector. Instead, they wished to encourage foreign investment in high technology industries and its accompanying infrastructure (Nayar 2000: 800). Over time, *swadeshi* was given a new meaning, consistent with globalization. In a 1998 interview with Yashwant Sinha, who served as Finance Minister in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government from 1998 to 2002, *swadeshi* was defined as “competition, going out to the world and winning,” with India only accomplishing this by becoming an economic superpower, and that “*swadeshi*, globalizer, and liberalizer are not contradictions in terms....globalization is the best way of being *swadeshi*” (Quoted in Nayar 2000: 810).

This shift to the economic right, over the years, has created a market-friendly and pro-business image for the BJP (Chhibber and Verma 2014: 52). The perceived failure of the Congress Party’s development agenda and as a reaction to their project to reify the secular state, Hindu nationalist groups offered alternative ideas of development, hinged on economic liberalization and a more authoritarian state (Rajagopal 2000: 470). As a result,

the BJP cloaked their development agenda in the language of pro-market reforms and neoliberalism, branding the party as the harbinger of market-based development. They diagnosed the issues facing the Indian nation as stemming from Nehruvian socialism and corrupt politics (Rajagopal 2000: 479). In some instances, this argument has been further simplified down to development as growth versus secularism and socialism. The political orientation around development articulated by Hindu nationalists has proven attractive to technical-professional migrants in the United States. In parallel to the BJP, social services wings of the Hindu nationalist movement capitalized on the changes brought by neoliberal policies and positioned themselves as caretakers for the poor and marginalized, aiding in hospitals and running clinics, schools, and vocational training programs. These strategies enabled social workers, particularly women, to meet the needs of the urban poor and articulate the Hindu Right's political agenda (Menon 2010: 106).

During the rise of Narendra Modi, these dynamics became especially apparent, as Modi's purported development successes in Gujarat were highlighted as a strength he would bring to the Prime Minister's office (Kashwan 2014: 48). The rise of Modi in the BJP also marked a break with the BJP's earlier economic nationalism, to imagining a growing role for India in the global economy. In many speeches leading up to the elections, in fact, Modi seemed to

... prod his audience to think of themselves as market players.... At this level, Modi's developmental model parallels Bollywood movies that sell dreams (Kashwan 2014: 51).

As will be seen, the tensions that are seen between the BJP, Congress, and leftists in India play out in the development orientations of the organizations in this study.

## **Shikshan: Masking Religion and Politics with the Language of Business**

Shikshan's model of one-teacher schools started with the establishment of schools by the VHP and its associated organizations in 1986. In 2000, a leading industrialist and religious leader came to the United States to meet with various leaders in the Indian American community. During these meetings, the president of the VHP-Overseas approached entrepreneurs in major urban areas to convince them to create a foundation for Indians in the United States to support the founding of one-teacher schools in remote areas. Hemant, one of the founders of the organization and volunteer in the chapter, shared why this was so important to support:

The *Adivasis*<sup>6</sup>[tribal groups] are so far out in the country that they have no access to modernization or even the religious teachings of gurus<sup>7</sup>, so remote that they are uneducated and so we needed to have a focus on them.

Shikshan was founded primarily to be the fundraising arm in the United States for a wider network of organizations operating in India. Funds from Shikshan go to two organizations -- Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) and Bharat Lokh Shiksha Parishad (BLSP), which translates to India Public Education Council. FTS predominately operates in south and central India, particularly in the states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, which have large tribal populations. BLSP operates in northern India, including Jammu and Kashmir. FTS is known to have ties to the RSS and VHP and has even been credited with helping the BJP gain electoral success in 2004 (Dhar 2004). FTS once received Central government funds from the Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry, but this funding was cut in

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<sup>6</sup> *Adivasi* refers to the indigenous population of India. They often live in very remote, heavily forested areas in Central and South India.

<sup>7</sup> Gurus are typically spiritual teachers or guides in Hinduism.



2005 when a study by the ministry found that FTS misused funds and was using the grants “for creating disharmony amongst religious groups and creating a political cadre.” One example, cited by the HRD ministry, was that Hindu Gods were used to teach the alphabet and students were instructed to respond to roll call with ‘Jai Shri Ram’<sup>8</sup> (Joshua, May 16, 2005). A representative of the VHP stated that the schools supported by Shikshan “impart the Hindu way of life till the third class” and the focus on tribal areas “save tribals from being misguided and influenced by foreign missionaries” (Sabrang 2002: 40). As will be seen, many Shikshan volunteers were unaware of these specifics about the Hindu Right’s political activism in India; however, they were aware of criticism that Shikshan was classified as “too Hindu.” They felt that this criticism was meant to discredit their work.

One of the major strengths of Sangh Parivar-affiliated groups, the collective of Hindu political and social action organizations, has been their ability to distance themselves from other *Hindutva* groups by creating newly-sprouted organizations with innocuous names, while still maintaining linkages that provide organizational and financial support (Mukta 2000: 444). Shyam-ji, who works on the ground in India with Shikshan-funded schools and is an RSS *karyakarta*, or campaign worker, exemplifies the interlinkages between these groups. Shikshan volunteers cite Shyam-ji’s work as being key to the success of Shikshan’s projects in India. Shyam-ji worked not just with Shikshan schools but also regularly writes for the RSS’ magazine *Organiser*. Because of his links with that organization, many of the

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<sup>8</sup> Jai Shri Ram can mean “Hail Lord Ram” or “Victory to Lord Ram.” Ram is the central character of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*.

grassroots volunteers, teachers, and school workers at Shikshan-funded schools were drawn from the RSS. One Shikshan volunteer, Sheela, felt that,

The RSS cadre of workers are motivated to make a difference in India. They get a bad name because of Gandhi's assassination, but really, they are disciplined in how they work. Ninety nine percent may be Hindu, but they are more concerned with making India strong, keeping the culture -- they do not want people to lose those cultural roots.

Sheela's sentiments highlight the notion of culture as an important component to development. Of course, the question to be raised is whose cultural roots are being promoted, especially in an area where *Adivasis* or lower caste groups are the main recipients of services from organizations that are funded predominately by upper caste, urban, diasporic Indians.

Shikshan has received attention for its links to Hindu groups. As such, this issue came up frequently during interviews. Research participants rationalized the linkages Shikshan has to groups like the RSS and the extent to which the organization has a "Hindu bias." Hemant felt that because many of the people who started the organization were Hindu that was a reason people felt it was "Hindu-dominated." Furthermore, he added,

When people claim Shikshan is not secular, I like to remind people, especially those that got an education in Christian schools... they have a bias as well. They exist to spread Christianity...I think the media, especially the English speaking media, tends to take secularism to the extent of being anti-Hindu. You can be religious and not discriminate.

Christian schools, also called convent schools, are administered, currently or formerly, by Christian organizations (LaDousa 2014, 26). In urban India, these schools gained popularity with the middle class, as they were some of the first schools to offer English-medium instruction, before the growth of other English-medium private schools (LaDousa

2014, 13). In most cases, these schools are open about their religious affiliation, unlike Shikshan-funded schools.

Deepak, one of the officers for the chapter, shared his frustrations at what he felt was discrimination against Shikshan because of these politics:

We now face difficulties working with organizations like the Indian American Foundation because we are accused of working with the BJP. And because of this, we face difficulties also in India, especially in areas that are controlled by the Congress Party.

Adding to the appearance of a linkage between Shikshan and the Hindu Right in India, until 2009, a representative from the VHP served on Shikshan's board. The presence of a VHP member on the board, according to Shweta, one of the early members of Shikshan,

... became a political football. So we had to ask those board members to step down. We wanted people to know that we were not taking direction from some other organization.

Deepak echoed this sentiment, stating that

Things may have been a certain way in the past, but we can be assured now that we are not driven by outside influences. We are involved in making the decisions now about what and how to do things.

While in India, the linkages between Shikshan and Hindu Right organizations were kept intact, in the United States, the appearance of Shikshan's independence from these organizations was important, not just for external appearances but to volunteers as well. This tactic is not uncommon for Hindu Right-affiliated organizations in the diaspora. For example, at camps for children to learn about Hinduism, run by the RSS' overseas branch, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), this message is often milder in its approach or contains no mention of Sangh-related organizations (Rajagopal 2000: 483).

*Hindutva* in the United States has adapted to the particular context of the United States and in no way resembles the traditional *shakhas*<sup>9</sup> in India:

There was no way that business executives, the prime HSS target, were going to get up at dawn to salute the saffron flag reciting Sanskrit anthem- and even less do calisthenics in khaki shorts! (Jaffrelot and Therwath 2007: 287).

Whereas members of the RSS or other Hindu-right organizations may engage in paramilitary training at *shakhas* in India, these same tactics do not attract members of the diaspora. Instead, more normalized Hindu symbolism is employed. Shikshan's public events included Hindu symbolism. Annually, Shikshan hosts a musical gala as its major fundraising event. In 2015, this event was a collection of singers and musicians from the Hindi film industry, and in 2016, they featured alumni of Shikshan schools. Each of these events began with the lighting of a diya and an invocation to Ganesh, but otherwise did not mention the group's links to other Hindu organizations in India or specifically classify itself as a Hindu organization. Another veiled way in which this is addressed is Shikshan's focus on culture and tradition, rather than religion. In fact, at the 2015 fundraiser, the MC asked the audience to aspire to be "Indian Jews" in terms of how they save money, value education, engage deeply with their culture, and give back to their community. At the same fundraiser events, one of the speakers of the evening shared that Shikshan was ensuring that "where children smile, there is hope and happiness." Shikshan's work in supporting these schools was "instrumental in uploading the spiritual, culturally rich heritage of India" (Shikshan Fundraising Event, April 18, 2015).

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<sup>9</sup> A *shakha* is a branch or site where much of the basic work of Hindu groups like the RSS take place. In the diaspora, a *shakha* is often the chapter of the local HSS.

Right-wing groups that were previously at the margins of Indian society and politics have, over time, moved more towards the center (Bhatt 2004: 199), allowing them to gain traction among diasporic Indians but also the mainstream political landscape in India, as highlighted by the 2014 election campaign of the BJP. Furthermore, the organizations adopted the same pro-economic growth rhetoric used by the BJP. They linked their work to the trajectory of economic growth in India. Shikshan volunteers framed the organization's work as supporting social entrepreneurship and investing in students who would later contribute back to their villages and communities. While this rhetoric glamorizes capitalism and the power of individuals to contribute to that system through social entrepreneurship, it "depoliticizes discourse by collapsing the distance between the market and the negative impacts it has on human well-being" (Nickel and Eikenberry 2009: 975).

The shift towards entrepreneurial philanthropy and social entrepreneurship (Bajde 2013: 3) is not new. Social entrepreneurship in philanthropy has been associated with promoting businesses and the creation of entrepreneurs as fundamental to social change (Teasdale 2011: 100), rather than addressing social or cultural barriers that exist to women, minorities, and other marginalized groups. Furthermore, the state is implicated in failing to address social issues, prioritizing the role of other actors to solve these problems (Teasdale 2011: 103). From the perspective of many participants in this research, the Indian state particularly fails because of rampant corruption. Solutions to these problems are couched in business and economic terms, with non-governmental sources assumed to be better equipped at addressing these issues. This paradigm has been one of major leading trends in the world of donor-client relations, led by one of the largest microfinance non-profits, Kiva. For many adherents to this turn in philanthropy, it changes the conversation

of traditional charity, focused on “the suffering, helplessness, and hopelessness of the poor” to a discussion of “effective, hope-inspiring, egalitarian, opportunity for individuals to actively and effectively participate in poverty alleviation,” so that the poor “no longer merely ‘consume the aid’ but rather invest it into their personal and community progress”(Bajde 2013: 9). In this sense, the poor are no longer recipients of charity but are the beneficiaries of investments and reimagined as worthy participants in the market. It is also a form of philanthropy that is results-driven (Eikenberry 2009: 3). In the case of Shikshan, this investment is in the education of children, with the hopes that they will go on to better their villages and communities.

Shikshan volunteers echoed the language of entrepreneurial philanthropy in describing their work, talking about the efficacy of the schools, running on only \$1 a day, and the scalability of the model of the schools in any part of India. Students were referred to as social entrepreneurs, in whom donors were investing. Gautam, one of the second generation-Indian American volunteers with Shikshan, felt that the ability to have an impact on a large number of people was a key part of why he was involved with the organization; Shikshan’s services could reach a number of people for a very low cost. This language of social investment and scalability reflects the professional background of many Shikshan volunteers, many of whom started their own businesses, were entrepreneurs, or had experience working with startups. In fact, the founders of Shikshan were drawn from a large networking organization for South Asian entrepreneurs that continues to be a feeder organization for volunteers to this day. This focus on the scalability and replicability of the projects is a major way Shikshan distinguished itself from other organizations.

## **Asai: Drawing the Line Between Secular and Religious, Political and Apolitical**

As an organization, Asai presents itself as a secular organization with no political affiliation. Over the course of this research, questions about what political affiliation means seemed to be at the heart of the organization: does no political affiliation equate to absolutely no political action? Or does it literally mean no affiliation to a political party? In practice, this rule has seemed to imply no political action. Because of the decentralized nature of Asai, chapters may differ in the politics they practice and groups that they choose to associate with. For example, in Tukdeo's research, the Asai chapter at the University of Illinois, while claiming to be apolitical, often supported conservative Indian groups on campus and was missing from progressive South Asian actions on campus (Tukdeo 2010: 73). Ramya, an officer with the Vikas Sangathan chapter in this study, had been active with Asai before she moved to the West Coast. She recounted how her previous chapter in the northeastern US had been fairly political. The chapter hosted a few programs of a political nature, including candle light vigils when riots broke out in India and demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the Bhopal disaster<sup>10</sup>. The chapter often received warnings from Asai Central saying they could not engage in these activities in the name of Asai, especially since it could cost the organization donors. While internally the events were planned by the chapter, during the actual event, their affiliations to Asai had to be dropped.

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<sup>10</sup> On December 2-3, 1984, a gas leak occurred at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Half a million people were exposed to the lethal gas, and thousands died or were permanently scarred. It is one of the worst industrial accidents to have occurred. Many activists continue to call for Dow Chemical, the parent company of Union Carbide, to aid in the cleanup of Bhopal and pay damages to the victims.

There are certainly variations across chapters; idiosyncrasies linked to who comprised the membership and the leadership of the chapter were just two factors that could lead to differences between chapters. For example, Prachi, a volunteer with Asai, worked in a legal non-profit serving low-income individuals and has been a member of multiple chapters. One of the chapters she had been a member of in Washington state was more focused on having multiple small event fundraisers and more family focused than the chapter in this study, as many volunteers in that chapter were married and had children. The chapter in this study, according to Prachi, was more philosophical and encouraged more discussion of the different issues facing project partners and the specific details related to the context of projects. She attributed this difference to the work of volunteers in the chapter who were more invested in specific projects and wanted to ensure that volunteers learned from the various projects.

Discussing the projects was used as a way to make volunteers aware about different issues in education in India. As will be discussed in a later chapter, the role of organizations like Asai in educating Indians in the United States, especially volunteers, about development-related issues in India is a unique function of these organizations as compared to larger, more professional philanthropic organizations. Many professionally managed organizations limit participation in their work, using instead ad hoc committees of volunteers, and have become sites of employment, managing civic endeavors from afar (Skocpol 2003: 207). The organizations in this study are deeply embedded in the communities with which they interface, and the borders between the community and the organization are far more fluid, as anyone who wants to come to meetings, facilitate a project, or help organize fundraisers, can become a member at any time.



Its apolitical and secular stance serves to bolster Asai's profile as a viable organization for donors to contribute to and volunteers to become involved in. In a strategic document, Asai's leadership recognized that creating a brand would be a key way to make the organization stand out in an arena where more and more players were entering. According to positioning documents, Asai's strength lay in its fully volunteer based work, strict adherence to secularism and lack of political affiliation, and the organization's "authenticity" and longevity in the Indian community as one of the first organizations to create a model of philanthropy and volunteerism in this community to support development-related projects in India (Asai Governance Documents, Accessed August 21, 2016). Bhavana, who has long been with Asai and coordinates its marathon program, felt that,

Our non-affiliation and strong secular stance is a huge factor in who we get as volunteers. Our passion is solely on education and helping kids in India. For that reason, we get great volunteers that aren't focused on one state, religion- we get people who come because they like what we do.

This sentiment seems to echo that of many volunteers who felt that the work of Asai was a "cause many could get behind" because it served children and education, both seemingly "uncontroversial causes to promote" (Interview with Sumit, August 13, 2015).

However, the lack of political action accompanying this work often leads to tensions with project partners in India. At the national conference in 2007, a project partner was the keynote speaker, and he cited that he was glad Asai was involved in so many projects, but that, as an organization, they should aim to have a more,

...progressive engagement with India's education. I have been working with grassroots groups in India for twenty years, and let me now assure you, our topmost need is not funds from abroad.

This lack of political engagement has also been the source of a parting of ways with one of Asai's founders. Pradeep founded Asai in 1991 with other doctoral students. Most of the early founders returned to India and became involved in different social causes. Pradeep became involved with grassroots organizations like the National Association of People's Movements (NAPM) and later delved into politics, supporting leftist political parties in India. Through his involvements with NAPM,

I started to have differences with Asai 10 years after founding the organization. I realized that it was very limited in its focus, and I even feel it was not a good idea to form Asai. It is supporting an education system that is discriminatory. But if some people got more involved and started addressing other issues at a microlevel, that [sic] we can do more work at the macro-level to change policy (Phone Interview with Pradeep, February 12, 2015).

Pradeep further shared that, in his mind, Asai's work would only make actual change if the organization became more involved in the political issues and ground realities in India. Because Pradeep became particularly vocal in his views on inequality and social change in India, Asai has listed a disclaimer on its website to, in a sense, put some distance between themselves and their founder, specifically citing that Asai is a "non-hierarchical organization, with its mission and activities decided by its volunteers collectively ...individual volunteer opinions do not necessarily reflect the views of Asai." This statement goes on to say,

Over the last 10 years, we have diligently been working towards our goal of children's education.... We have earned the trust of our volunteers, supporters, and donors through our actions, the results of which are easy to see in the eyes of any of the thousands of children we support (Asai Website, Accessed July 17, 2017).

Of course, funding plays a role in the decision of organizations to pursue this middle path. Extra inquiries into the root causes of poverty or other social issues related to education

issues in India or even specific projects supported by the chapter were neglected, especially at public events, sticking to a discourse that frames education as a cure-all. The politics of an organization like Asai are reflected in the language of their approach. Terms used by the international development community, like universal primary education, access, community involvement, and decentralization, are common phrases used to describe Asai projects.

While Asai proved to be secular in the projects it supported, many of their fundraising efforts were a nod to the hegemony of Hinduism among Indian Americans. For example, many of their fundraising efforts centered on events related to Hindu holidays, like Holi, Diwali, and Dandiya. While the role of religion here is very subtle, it still is a central part of the organization's fundraising plans. While events like Holi, which have become large enough to also attract a sizeable non-Indian audience, are largely stripped of their Hindu associations (in fact, the Holi celebration is often held long after the actual date of Holi), other events keep their Hindu connotations in place. For example, in creating marketing materials for a Dandiya fundraiser, one volunteer expressed concern that there was not enough Hindu symbolism on the flyers. In particular, they wanted diyas placed on the flyer rather than just advertising the dancing and entertainment aspects of the event.

One of the challenges facing Asai is that there is a disconnect between their major fundraising programs, the bike and marathon training program, and the work of the chapter. For example, a number of volunteers with Asai were involved through a marathon fundraising program and never attended a chapter meeting, despite years of running in supporting of the organization. Aarthi joined Asai because of this program. One of her coworkers was involved with Asai, and invited her to attend the first run of the year,

I didn't even have a car, and [my coworker] took me to the kickoff, and the atmosphere was very amazing and very positive, full of energy. And it just inspired you to just do it. So I signed up for the program. And ever since, I've been with [Asai].

Aarthi chose to be more involved with the chapter, but for others, like Bhavana, who continues to coordinate the marathon-training program, their involvement with Asai was strictly with the training program. The central organizers of that program were familiar with Asai and its work but acknowledged that there was a gap in sharing information about Asai's work with participants in the marathon program. In fact, the marathon program, at the time of this research, operated almost like a parallel organization to the main chapter.

One incident during this research highlighted the reluctance of Asai to engage in or support actions that could be considered political. The funding for one of the schools Asai supported in northeast India was being held up by the central governing body because the school had joined a coalition of actors to oppose dams being built. The funds were being held up more because Asai could not decide whether or not the action constituted a political action, thereby disqualifying the school from support from Asai. Volunteers were concerned that funding that was given to the organization was going towards this activism. On the other hand, other volunteers recognized that involvement in this movement was also a livelihood issue for many people in the region, as the families of the students attending the schools would more than likely be displaced by the dams. (Interview with Sumit, September 4, 2015). At the time of this writing, Asai had essentially decided on this issue by delaying a decision. Because of the ongoing debate, a vote to send funds was never taken, and therefore, funding was not given to the school.

Asai's political orientation seems to follow what Angie Chung (2005:920) calls "mainstream liberalism," supporting middle-of-the-road issues generally accepted by many within and outside of the organization, but also operating on the belief that it is not the role of the organization to address and remedy political issues. With such an orientation,

The advantage is that the organization can rally wider community support and significant elite resources by appearing politically moderate in ideology and neutral in its actions while still indirectly advocating its interests through social networks. The disadvantage is...[that we are] more dependent on and thus vulnerable to, outside support (2005: 922).

This is not dissimilar from what has been found in other studies on civic engagement in immigrant communities. Participants may disavow politics or perceive politics to be dirty and corrupt, although they are inclined towards civic engagement (Ramakrishnan and Bloemradd 2008: 16). In this way, Asai is able to use support for education, a seemingly non-political issue to be involved with, and attract donors and volunteers to their cause. As will be discussed later in this chapter, transnational distances and loosely coupled organizational functions, allow for some forms of political action that maintains Asai's apolitical appearances.

### **Vikas Sangathan: Striking a Balance Between Politics and Donors**

The notion of development, itself, is a political notion, and Vikas Sangathan certainly acknowledges that having the word "development" in its name is a marker of those politics (*vikas* means development in Sanskrit and Hindi). Why would an organization use such a loaded term in its name to describe the work it is doing? Santosh, one of the founders of Vikas Sangathan, acknowledged that development is a very contested term, "when political parties say they are developing India, they mean they are exploiting natural resources." But

as an organization, Vikas Sangathan takes a “holistic approach” with the idea that “for all of the problems that Vikas Sangathan is seeking to address, the solutions need to also be complex.” Santosh felt that volunteers in Vikas Sangathan should not just seek to address development issues in India, but also think about their own contributions to social problems,

We have to recognize that we are also the problem. We are part of it or we are the cause of it...Now I know you can't go to volunteers or donors and tell them they are the problem, but you have to tell them they are the solution and the answers are out there.

Santosh further added that the makeup of volunteers in Vikas Sangathan created another challenge to overcome in this work,

We have to recognize that we are privileged; most of us are upper caste, urban, educated, upper middle class. But we are also very talented, and for very challenging problems we will need challenging solutions. We shouldn't simply reduce the challenge by just doing education and not recognize the complexity of the issue. (Conversation with Santosh at Vikas Sangathan Annual Conference, May 30, 2015.)

Vikas Sangathan engages in social justice politics, defined by Angie Chung in her research on Korean American organizations, as a mode of thinking about social problems as contextualized within “broader power structures and [are] often based on a complex understanding of the multiple bases of oppression” (Chung 2005: 923). Vikas Sangathan often works with grassroots organizations serving politically and socially marginalized communities. As such, Vikas Sangathan actively encourages its chapters to tackle some of the major political issues, going as far as to send out discussion guides and exercises for the chapters on organization-wide listservs. Shashank shares an example of what one of these exercises looked like,

We did this one very funny activity once where they tried to showcase how hypocritical we are. They asked us to raise our hands if we had ever paid a bribe to get a driver's license [in India], which almost all of us had in some way or another... and then the questions got harder asking us to re-think to help the greater good. We can't be paying a bribe and claim to be against corruption.

On a very basic level Vikas Sangathan does try to engage in the politics of transnational solidarity, and, at the same time, hold a mirror to NRIs, asking them "what kinds of development in India are Indians in the U.S. making possible?" (Bose 2008: 127).

Other volunteers in Vikas Sangathan have mentioned that when they first joined, one of the difficulties they faced was coming to terms with the fact that development involved more than just economic growth. Anand, a volunteer with Vikas Sangathan since 2003, admitted,

There is very little sense in coming to Vikas Sangathan with a middle class perspective of development. For most of the projects we support, you really have to see it from the viewpoint of the poor.

Vikas Sangathan does not shy away from political matters as an organization, and in fact, actively encourages discussions on political issues in chapter meetings and other public fora. The chapter meetings, in fact, foster a great deal of discussion around issues related to particular projects. For example, one project supported by the chapter was a rights-based education program run by an organization in Andhra Pradesh that served *Adivasi* and Dalit communities. The focus of their work was to educate these communities on their rights, accorded by the Right to Information Act and the Forest Rights Act, also called the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, Recognition of Forest Rights Act. The latter act, which went into effect in 2006, provided protections for communities living in the forests and gave them rights to the land and to protect their management of the land.

Despite this, there are often incursions that impact *Adivasi* and Dalit communities, such as land-grabbing by mining companies. Under the provisions of the act, communities can take legal action against incursions. The discussion about this project opened up a whole discussion on what the Forest Rights Act was, as many volunteers were not aware of it. The other concern in relation to this was whether or not the organization faced scrutiny from the government for being sympathetic to Naxalites. The Naxals are a disparate group of Maoist guerillas through a swath of central India that has become known as the Red Corridor. The government has often labeled social activists and organizations working in these communities as being sympathetic to Naxals, as a means to discredit them. This latter issue concerned volunteers, as the funded partner organization was helping the local communities stand up to industrialists.

Vikas Sangathan staunchly holds a secular line. Unlike Asai, many chapter events and fundraisers were held in conjunction with Indian national holidays like Indian Independence Day or Republic Day. With the growing strength of the political right in India, Vikas Sangathan has emphasized secularism. Vikas Sangathan hosted a number of discussions, both publicly and in the confines of chapter meetings, on this issue as a response to the unrest and violence in Gujarat in 2002 and the continued struggle for civic groups to hold Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat and elected as Prime Minister in 2014, accountable for the riots. This stance has been construed by local Hindu temples and more conservative Indian-American organizations as being anti-Hindu. However, the discomfort with engaging with local religious organizations was also felt by volunteers. During an Indian community event, Vikas Sangathan was made to share half a table with an organization seeking to raise funds to build a temple in the local area. Volunteers were



concerned about how this would reflect on Vikas Sangathan. Additionally, in a Vikas Sangathan-wide fundraising coordination call, many older volunteers suggested that a great venue for fundraising would be to work with local Hindu temples, an idea that was immediately rejected by volunteers in the chapter in this study.

While the organization tends to engage in a form of progressive politics, there have been also instances of volunteers expressing their disagreements with actions taken by individuals in the chapter, including participating in or advertising leftist causes or protests. The chapter had formed a number of alliances with leftist organizations in the local area and would participate in protests for local issues as well as for issues in India. For example, many leftist South Asian organizations were organizing to protest Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States in 2015. Emails and coordination for this event went out over the Vikas Sangathan listserv, though with the caveat that it was not an official Vikas Sangathan event. The announcement started a flurry of emails, ranging in sentiments. One volunteer wrote (emphasis is the original author's),

I am not happy with the statement "Even though Vikas Sangathan is not an official part of the demonstrations happening at the current prime minister's talks, **such announcements are welcome on our list serves**". From my understanding the consensus was to not associate with the event in question because it might result in negative impact with donors. Then, I don't understand how emails related to that event are welcome on our mailing lists... also the statement "**such announcements are welcome on our list serves**" is too broad. Can someone who believes in Digital India campaign send an email saying "Welcome Modi" even if we agree to not associate with such events? (Email on Listserv, September 27, 2015)

Meanwhile, another volunteer shared this sentiment, which seemed critical of Vikas Sangathan's lack of official support for the event (as written by original author),

Frankly, while I'm not surprised that Vikas Sangathan is not supporting the protest, it's still very baffling and beats common sense to stay out of

supporting decency, the idea of a India where all communities can live in peace, which is what the protest is all about. Because Mr. Modi and his ruling party represents everything against those ideals. Vikas Sangathan officially claims the ideals of India's constitution, but it is very baffling (though not surprising based on previous experiences) that Vikas is not taking an official position on the protest.

While not all the members of Vikas Sangathan adhered to the same political ideology, the core group of members and chapter leadership shared very similar left-leaning ideology. As such, this helped the chapter to be politically active without completely advocating on one issue or another or using the organization as a vehicle for political action. Political action took place informally or through the actions of individuals, though coordinated within the structure of the organization.

In a later discussion on Modi's visit to the West Coast, Ramya, then chapter President, expressed that while it is fitting for Vikas Sangathan to be a part of such protests, the organization is also tied to the reality that it still must appeal to donors for support,

Vikas Sangathan stands for democratic rights for all people, and dissent is a very important part of these rights. We have regularly voiced our concerns about policies and acts of sitting governments over the years through demonstrations, petitions, press statements (Email on Organization Listserv, September 27, 2015).

During its national conference in 2015, Vikas Sangathan grappled with the election of Narendra Modi to the office of Prime Minister, realizing the implications this might have for their grassroots partners. They had also to contend with the fact that the overwhelming success of the BJP in the elections in India indicated that the BJP's popularity in the diaspora was a force to be reckoned with, especially with volunteers and donors. During the conference, a skit was performed to highlight the perspective of pro-Modi volunteers, including common talking points specifically related to positive claims about Modi's record

of development while he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. The skit played out ways to respond to these talking points about Modi and how to debunk them.

The skit also addressed the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), a third party contender in elections with the Congress Party and BJP. Arvind Kejriwal, who had received past support from Vikas Sangathan for his anti-corruption work, led AAP. The party's platform focused on curbing government corruption. Many former project partners had contested in the 2014 elections with the Aam Aadmi Party. For example, Soni Sori, an *Adivasi* activist ran for a seat in the State Assembly in Chhattisgarh. In relation to this issue, the skit pointed out that while Vikas Sangathan had supported some of the AAP politicians in the past, they were no longer officially affiliated with Vikas Sangathan. These discussions continued at the chapter level. Anti-Modi volunteers debunked notions that Modi was somehow better for development in India and called into question the meaning of development. Pro-Modi volunteers in chapter meetings utilized their own personal experiences living in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat, as an example of the growth and order Modi would bring to India as the Prime Minister.

Throughout Vikas Sangathan's history, discussions on hot button political issues in India have proven to be a major flashpoint. While the discussions aim to be open and to generate a healthy exchange, in some cases there is a disconnect between the organization and the volunteer base. For example, Vikas Sangathan chose to support the efforts of Medha Patkar, a social activist in Gujarat who protested the building of dams along the Narmada River and advocated for those displaced by the dams. In the process of planning the dams, the villagers that would be displaced were never consulted nor were those already displaced given compensation. Patkar's protest against the dam has been ongoing

from 1985 to today. There were a number of volunteers that, while they sympathized with the activists, also felt that the bigger need for India was reliable and clean energy sources. A number of volunteers left the organization because of the support for Patkar (Discussion with Santosh at Vikas Sangathan Conference, May 30, 2015). In an interview with Vijay, a volunteer with Asai, he specifically mentioned that Vikas Sangathan's support of Patkar was too political and one of the reasons he chose to support Asai over Vikas Sangathan.

Discussions on caste were another area of controversy. Through their work with Vikas Sangathan, many respondents reported that they better understood the nuances of caste issues. A few even remarked that they had been staunchly anti-reservation, and since joining Vikas Sangathan, found that they re-evaluated their stance on the issue as they learned more about the oppressions facing lower caste individuals. Shashank shared that when he first joined Vikas Sangathan, he was active in anti-Reservation activities, to the point of even putting up a website and blog focusing on this issue. Since being in Vikas Sangathan, he says he now "looks through a very different lens" at these issues,

The community that is a part of Vikas Sangathan has helped me realize that these things are complicated and that I may have the wrong reasoning. I have not completely changed my mind, but I am also learning. Vikas Sangathan really helps with that process of learning and also unlearning (Interview with Shashank, August 21, 2014).

As shall be seen in a later chapter, these discussions in chapters and interactions with project partners from India serve as an informal education, and in some cases re-education, on social issues in India.

This openness and willingness to discuss, and disagree, is one of the major attractions of Vikas Sangathan for many volunteers. Pankaj, a volunteer who had been with the organization since 2006, found that

We have disagreements, but it is really about sharing ideas. And of course, the broader idea of development issues and working in India is the thing that connects all of us, despite of what we believe or where we are from in India. There is an openness there.

In addition to funding different projects in India, Vikas Sangathan also runs a number of awareness campaigns, in tandem with popular movements in India. Ramya first became involved with Vikas Sangathan through the “Free Binayak Sen” campaign. Binayak Sen was a doctor in Chhattisgarh who was arrested for allegedly working with the Naxalites, an insurgent group in Central India. The campaign focused on his imprisonment and worked to free him. More recent campaigns revolved around the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bhopal gas explosion and raising awareness about the environmental damage and mercury poisoning as a result of Unilever’s factories in Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu. At the chapter level, these campaigns typically consist of a public event featuring a talk by a project partner from India who is close to the issue and a parallel social media campaign, posting news stories and other calls to action to donate or get involved in other ways. Over the course of this research, these special appeals included an awareness campaign for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, a call to boycott Unilever products because of mercury poisoning from their factories in Kodaikanal, and a partnership with the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, an organization focused on Dalit women’s issues to raise awareness about the issues at the intersection of caste and gender in India and in the diaspora.

Some of these civic actions have created legal issues for Vikas Sangathan’s Indian branch. At the time of this research, Vikas Sangathan’s Indian branch was under an indefinite audit and their finances frozen, stemming from its activities supporting anti-

nuclear activists against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu. Vikas Sangathan-India was criticized by the government for taking foreign funds to undermine India's nuclear program. This has been part of a larger campaign of scrutiny of NGOs by the Indian government. In 2014, India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) released a report identifying several foreign-funded NGOs that are "negatively impacting economic development" and using "people-centric issues to create an environment which lends itself to stalling development projects." According to the IB report, the cost to India's economy is as much as \$60 billion annually (Simha 2014). Because of the indefinite audit, Vikas Sangathan-India could no longer accept money from abroad. Organizationally, this created a major obstacle for Vikas Sangathan's US chapters to send money to project partners in India, as Vikas Sangathan-India's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) clearance covered a number of projects, especially for smaller organization that did not have resources to obtain FCRA clearance (Vikas Sangathan Community Service Hours, December 16, 2014).

Perhaps because of the more progressive politics embraced by Vikas Sangathan, many of the members acknowledged contradictions in their own lives to the work they supported in Vikas Sangathan. For example, Sri, a Vikas Sangathan volunteer who was particularly interested in environmental issues, recognized the irony of addressing environmental issues while also working for a company known for having a shoddy environmental record worldwide. Respondents in similar situations rationalized this, arguing that their time in the US was intended to earn money and benefit from a globalized economy and use their resources to support Vikas Sangathan's work *for* India.

### **Inter-Organizational Politics**

Many political issues in India spill over into the diaspora and are reflected in the politics between the organizations in this study. Furthermore, many of these organizations operate in close proximity with each other, which brings opportunities for collaboration and contention. Accusations have been lobbed about these organizations from both the political right and left as to their motives, political standing, and secular or religious affiliation.

Historically, there has been synergy between the two chapters of Vikas Sangathan and Asai in this study, especially in the early 1990s. Both organizations support some of the same projects in India. Therefore, they often collaborate to invite project partners to come to the United States and share information about their work. In the 1990s, they also worked together opposing *Hindutva* groups. As such, both organizations have been in the crosshairs of right-wing Hindu organizations and activists in the United States. Lata, who had been a volunteer with a leftist South Asian-American organization and member of Vikas Sangathan in the late 1990s, found that

In 1999 Vikas Sangathan would host speakers and these right-wing groups would come and protest.... For example, a famous activist was invited to speak.... Right wing groups came and protested, calling him a Communist and then even started coming to other Vikas Sangathan events and protesting. That really started around 2000: which was concurrent with the BJP coming to power, which I think emboldened groups to attack secular organizations.

In a blog titled “The Truth About Liars: Activities, Ideologies, and Methods of a Nexus of Anti-India and Anti Hindu Elements,” both Asai and Vikas are painted as being anti-national for supposed ties to the Communist Party in India and left-leaning organizations in the United States, like Forum of Indian Leftists or Friends of South Asia (“Forum of Intentional Liars” 2011). Ramya, with Vikas Sangathan, mentioned how Vikas

Sangathan had even been banned from having booths at events held in temples because of the stance Vikas Sangathan takes on certain topics, but also because they have been labeled as anti-Hindu by bloggers and other conservative groups.

Volunteers, of course, are aware of these critiques. Some volunteers with Asai mentioned that they were not interested in being involved with Vikas Sangathan because of the stand they take on political issues. Vijay, a volunteer with Asai, shared,

I was attracted to Asai because it is staunchly not affiliated to a religion or a political party or any other political affiliations.... Vikas Sangathan supports social upliftment and even political causes, and some that are just controversial, like funding groups opposing the Narmada River project. I just wanted to stay away from the politics.

On the other hand, Hemant, with Shikshan, noted that Asai had been critical of Shikshan,

They [Asai] try to put impediments on Shikshan events and say the organization is not secular. I think this is part of other issues...There is this view that Modi is RSS, but the RSS is not extreme. It just ascribes to a Hindu way of life, disciplined habits, cultures, and a lot of volunteerism.

Many of the critiques are reflective of the traits that make these organizations distinctive from each other.

The main tension between these organizations remains that between Hindu Right groups and leftist groups. For example, Sabrang Communications, a non-profit organization based in Mumbai that highlights issues of communalism, and Friends of India, a collection of Indian American academics, software engineers, and a freelance writer, fired salvos at each other in 2002 when it was discovered that India Development and Relief Fund, founded after the Gujarat Earthquake in 2005 to provide disaster relief, had instead been funneling money from the United States to support Hindu-right groups, some of whom later participated in the pogroms in Gujarat that killed hundreds of Muslims. Sabrang



Communications pointed out the actions of *Hindutva* groups and their sources of funding, including Shikshan. Friends of India called out the “sinister role” of groups like Vikas Sangathan and Asai in blocking India’s development. The Friends of India’s critique of Sabrang’s report emphasizes points that have been harped on by right-wing groups when faced with criticism: the influence of foreign entities, the intense scrutiny on Hindu groups but not Muslim or Christians groups, and the political leanings of the authors (in this case, “the guiding grand narrative of the Hate Report is Marxism”)(Friends of India 2002). This report, “A Factual Response to the Hate Attack on the India Development and Relief Fund,” was in fact hosted through the website [letindiadevelop.org](http://letindiadevelop.org). The use of this URL highlights the strong presumption, politically, that the Hindu Right is pro-growth. Furthermore, it paints opposition to this paradigm as anti-growth and, even more dangerous for those that dissent, as anti-India. The politics of these organizations is a reminder that ethnic organizations are far more diverse and complex than simple notions of ethnic political solidarity (Chung 2005: 915), and that these organizations reflect the deep political divisions of the home country.

### **Strategies for Appearing Secular and Non-Political**

One shared feature among all of these organizations is the manner in which they utilize “loosely coupled” structures (Weick 1976) to distance themselves from political or religious associations by maintaining gaps between their structures and other activities (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 341). These are strategies utilized to maintain legitimacy and avoids conflicts or disputes with the organization’s set, formal rules (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 357). Through this type of organizational mode, each of these organizations is able to

access and utilize the resources available to them, without consequences that direct association might bring to the organization. Organizational segmentation, either consciously or unconsciously, proves to be a major strategy by organizations in this study to separate their activities from what could be perceived as controversial political action or direct religious affiliation.

In the context of India, and by extension in the Indian diaspora, the strict separation of religious beliefs and practices from secular activities may not be followed precisely. Religiosity in India is often publicly acknowledged, and its privatization is not common (Madan 2010: 182). Furthermore, the meanings and relevance of religion extends to a believer's "every day 'secular' life" (An-Na'im 2010: 225). An example of this can be seen by the manner in which major Hindu holidays, especially Holi or Diwali, are used by secular organizations like Asai as a time to host fundraising events. There may be behaviors that religious or secular organizations engage in that can blur this line between religious and secular. This research has found cases of passive secularism, allowing for religious activities by secular entities, especially in relation to majoritarian Hindu holidays or functions, and assertive secularism, the purposeful exclusion of religion from organizational activities (An-Na'im 2010: 227).

Asai attempts to distance itself from any political stances; however, there is work done on the ground in India by Asai Fellows in the realm of education policy advocacy. These Fellows are provided funding or stipends for the work they do to impact education issues and policymaking. While the main role of these individuals is to be the "eyes and ears on the ground" in India and conduct check-ins with project partners, a number of these fellows also work on political action through a parallel organization. The seemingly

apolitical nature of their work, which is attractive for volunteers and donors, is preserved because the more political advocacy work is carried out in India through more indirect channels.

Of course, the ignorance of volunteers and donors about the various histories and social issues in India is to not be neglected in the reason these segmentations can happen. Either volunteers romanticize activism or are just not aware of who the stakeholders and players are in addressing complicated social issues. For example, when interviewing volunteers with Shikshan, a handful, especially second-generation Indian American volunteers, were not aware of the linkages Shikshan had to right-wing groups in India or how it was a major political issue. Nalini, who had been involved with Shikshan from a young age with her family, remarked, “my family never really talked about politics in India,” as a way to downplay not being aware of the controversies surrounding the work of organizations funded by Shikshan in India.

The transnational nature of the work of these organizations allows for a greater degree of separation between the work being done in the United States and the work being done in India. This physical distance, coupled with the social distance for many diasporic Indians from those most affected by different projects, allows for further segmentation between the fundraising activities in the United States and the actions taking place on the ground in India. Most of the communication about the impact of the work is transmitted through volunteers and organizational publications, which is a filter through which the work becomes understood. But these are also an important means, as shall be seen in a later chapter, by which volunteers and the Indian community at large become more aware of these social issues when they otherwise would not have had a vested interest.

## **Conclusion**

Within the milieu of Indian American organizations, it is important to account for the various politics that surround these organizations, their interactions with each other, and the social and political contours of the community. The nature of politics must be examined as the number of organizations centered on development issues back in India grows, especially given the very political nature of development. The cultural-cognitive structure of these organizations is a key part of their culture and influences their frame of reference (Nebojsa 2015: 453). Because of their politics, approaches to development are seen in different ways. The flow of money from migrants to their home country has gained more attention as the relationship between migrants and development has come to be seen as increasingly relevant by sending country governments. As can be seen, the work of these organizations and the manner in which it is framed, creates a particular political orientation towards what development means. This also influences the space and culture created within these organizations.

The creation of spaces for gathering, for social, political, religious or cultural reasons, has been pivotal for ensuring immigrants are comfortable in their adopted home, but it is equally challenging to understand what community means. The notion of community becomes complicated further by the diversity of perspectives of what sort of communal connections individuals seek out, whether they are drawn to faith, national affiliation, hobbies, sexual orientation, gender, or occupation (Bhatt and Iyer 2013: 173). In their research on membership in two teaching organizations, Betz and Judkins (1975) found that many of the members held certain beliefs and attitudes before joining their

chosen organizations. They ultimately chose organizations that supported their viewpoints (1975:238). The creation of a political and religious or secular identity certainly is a differentiator for volunteers and influences their decision to become a member of a particular organization. As shall be seen, this intersection of organizational culture and individual motivations are a key component for fostering a space of belonging and acceptance, which will be discussed at length in chapter five of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE SCHOOL THAT HOPE BUILT: TRANSNATIONAL PHILANTHROPY AND EDUCATION FUNDING IN INDIA

Engagement in education initiatives is a major area of funding for Indian diaspora groups. In this chapter, I discuss the history of and changes to India's education system, the growing role of private actors in education, and the motivations and role of diaspora organizations in supporting education. While the main work of the organizations in this study primarily revolves around raising funds for education projects rather than project management, there is often intense discussion about the teaching techniques of the schools, how funds are being used, and the potential (economic) sustainability of such schools. These discussions then lead to other questions of how to evaluate schools, in what ways the organization can provide support other than money, for instance through technology support or knowledge transfers by educators in the United States, and myriad other logistical and strategic issues related to education in India. On the face of it, supporting education proves to be a draw for many Indians in the United States because they believe that their education was the key factor that enabled them to go abroad and succeed socially and economically. With that in mind, this chapter looks at how these organizations link education to social mobility and development. Second this chapter also turns its focus towards the volunteers and how their own experiences of immigration to the United States influence their participation in organizations.

Because of the withdrawal of the state from social service provision over the last two decades, migrants from the Global South residing and settled in the Global North have taken a more active role in filling the gap left by the state (Singh et al. 2010: 13). Specific to

Indian migrants in the United States, many come from urban areas in India, with a certain degree of modernity, Western orientation, and familiarity with English. Additionally, many are from the middle or upper middle classes and work in STEM fields (Ray 2013: 78). As such, Indian immigrants in the United States do not represent a random representative cross-section of Indian society but are selectively drawn from particular groups, specific networks, and migration chains (Hugo 2008: 51). These patterns of migration are shaped by economic and social opportunities offered by emigrating to the US from India as well as by the immigration policies of the United States. The immigration reforms of 1965 opened up channels to the United States, but those lines of migration are limited to high-skilled, highly educated migrants. This creates an interesting dynamic: India's status as a "Third World country" is belied by the well-educated, upper middle class diaspora based in a "First World country." As will be seen, these dynamics, heavily shape the emphasis given to education by these organizations; the personal histories and background of the volunteers, mostly highly educated and in professional fields, are a key factor in emphasizing the importance of education.

### **Civil Society Funding of Education in India**

Education has long been categorized as a basic social service and has been linked with achieving the aims of development. Increasingly, civil society actors, with cutbacks to education funding and lessening involvement of the government, have been seen as a natural provider of education for development purposes and political empowerment. Civil society has been seen as a powerful, transformative space to empower people, challenge the state, and support the spread of democracy. Historically in India, social service

organizations and associations were engaged in a number of projects that were “aimed at improving and strengthening their ‘community,’ ‘race’ and ‘country” (Watt 2005: 3). As part of these efforts, education was a major area of “charity for public good” (Watt 2005: 14). The education networks set up by civil society organizations pre-Independence were important for the later formation of a vibrant associational life, and the creation of an active citizenry that was oriented towards social service (Watt 2005: 158), a source of nation-building and development. This signaled a slight shift in philanthropy for social services, whereas earlier forms of philanthropy in India were, and continue to be, largely centered on religious institutions like temples, mosques, or churches. Education became a tool for nation-building, a break from the idea of education under the British Raj, which utilized education as part of a civilizing mission (Tschurennev 2012: 93).

One unique aspect of the founding of schools during the early nineteenth century was the transformation of popular, elementary education into a project of “school building,” with non-governmental entities playing a major role in founding schools and their curricula (Tschurennev 2012: 115). Early on, Christian missionaries established a number of schools throughout India; often these schools were conducted in English medium and did little to challenge social inequalities like the caste system. Instead, they tended to reinforce the status quo and, in some ways, co-opted elites into the colonial project (Vaugier-Chatterjee 2005: 10). The earliest schools set up by Indians, as distinct from those set up by the British colonial government, were founded by social service organizations like the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society. These organizations were both well-networked throughout the country and set up schools ranging from early childhood education to colleges and universities, with a particular emphasis on the latter.



These schools grew in prominence with the *Swadeshi* movement as a response to British and Christian school establishments. The challenge for Indian nationalists was to create a system that constructed an Indian modern that rejected the Western civilizing discourse but still was modern and would create a population that could participate in a “competitive and hierarchical world system” (Watt 2012: 22). Education played a central role as a social good for the founding of modern India, with this notion extending to the present day with “development workers and scholars speaking in rich tones of the benefits of education” (Jeffrey, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey 2008: 3). These early investments in higher education has meant a large share of Indian graduate emigrating for higher paying jobs around the globe (Agarwala 2015a: 85).

### **Decentralization and Education and the Diaspora**

Education continues to be one of India’s most pressing development challenges. The promise, since Independence, to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to age 14 has been an uphill battle. The hope, upon Independence, was that education could serve as a tool to equalize a society segregated along lines of caste, class, gender, and religion. Adding to this challenge, primary elementary education was not given predominance in development plans during the 1960s and 70s. Emphasis was placed on the production of skilled labor through higher education (Colclough and De 2010: 497). With the Constitutional Amendment of 1976, education was moved from the purview of state policy to the Central Government’s domain, granting the Central Government a prominent role in planning and financing education (Colclough and De 2010: 500).

During the 1980s, prevailing development paradigms emphasized the role of primary education in poverty eradication, especially as a way to bring greater productivity to rural and informal sector workers as well as general behavior changes in health, nutrition, and fertility (Colclough and De 2010: 497). The National Policy on Education in 1986 outlined numerous problems of the education system in India and reaffirmed the commitment to a common school system. However, it was amended in 1992 to open the door to private schools (Tukdeo 2010: 29). This act established the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS), to tackle the inability of education to meet the needs of many children in India (National Institute of Open Schooling 2015). An innovative policy instituted by the Indian government in 1989, NIOS established an education system to cater to the needs of students who could not attend regular schools, either because they worked, their families were migrant laborers, or other extenuating circumstances. It established a means by which students could take board exams to qualify for post 10<sup>th</sup> standard schooling and higher education. In many NIOS schools, students cover the same subjects as regular schools, but NIOS students has the option to take exams on demand to fit with their erratic schedule, or be allowed ample time to prepare for the exam, given their situation (Andrade 2008).

The 1990s saw an imperative to address inequities and consider more comprehensive planning for human well-being. Well-being, in this context, is defined as the ability to consume goods and services and the accessibility of the population to have the basic necessities for a productive and socially meaningful life (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004: 262). The 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan identified basic social service delivery, particularly health, nutrition, education, as one of the most urgent needs. Despite this focus on social

services, the economic liberalization India undertook in 1991 signaled a break from the state-led development paradigm, emphasizing decentralization and the rising responsibility of local civic action to provide social services. For example, the Panchayat Raj, local entities for self-government, were now vested with powers to manage development functions. A major part of this shift was that education was to be governed by local bodies at the district, village, and block levels (Colclough and De 2010: 501). In 1994, the District Primary Education Program solicited external assistance for elementary education from international agencies like UNDP and UNICEF. This has been, to date, the largest externally funded program in the developing world. The program emphasized decentralization, cost-management, and established a role for private actors in education (Tukdeo 2010: 30). While these initiatives were taking place, the language of “universal primary education” became replaced with raising “literacy levels” through short-term projects rather than setting up a universal, free system of education (Walton-Roberts 2005: 135). The literacy rate in 2011 was recorded at 73%, with 80.9% of males and 64.6% of women being literate. In 2015-2016, the rate of enrollment across India for students 6-10 years old was 99.2%, with the enrollment rate for 6-13 years being 96.9% (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018). Even with high rates of retention, the actual quality of education is suspect as classrooms are overcrowded, teacher training is subpar, and the number of teaching days are reduced as teachers are deployed for other work, such as census collecting (Walton-Roberts 2005: 135).

Declining quality of government schools with the new demand for education in English has led to the proliferation of private schools; however, they range widely in their quality of instruction (Walton-Roberts 2005: 136). As a result, private schools grew in

parallel to failing public services. These private schools, accessible only to elites, created a situation such that “public provision and private initiative face unresolved problems of inaccessibility, poor quality, and lack of affordability” (Geithner et al. 2004: xv). Education, for the middle classes, became the key to class mobility, with families placing their stakes in their children’s performance in school (LaDousa 2014: 6). Liberalization has driven people to seek fluency in English to access new economic opportunities; aptitude with English has become a marker of being middle class and symbolic of people’s class aspirations (LaDousa 2014: 15: 19). With decentralization and the greater role of private actors in education, there has been a rise in the number of private aided and unaided schools. Aided schools are privately managed, but the government pays the salaries and other expenses of the school, whereas unaided schools are entirely privately managed and funded (Tooley, Dixon, and Gomathi 2007: 541). For these schools, partnering with private sector funders is seen as advantageous for filling in funding gaps but also because the diaspora organizations are seen, unquestioningly, as ideologically neutral, efficient, and effective (Srivastava and Oh 2010: 460).

In the gap between rich and poor and quality of access, private actors have taken a larger role in education funding and program implementation. The Indian government began to see the economic potential from its citizens overseas, towards that end. The 2003 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas outlined the relationship and need for diaspora engagement in India, primarily through investments. The dialogue at this conference opened avenues for co-development. The move towards co-development has also been in response to decreases in foreign aid and brain drain. Co-development focused on the potential of migrants to contribute to their place of origin and support initiatives started by the

government, such as building infrastructure, capacity building, involving migrants in cooperative projects (Wise and Covarrubias 2010: 153). This has all been part of the move away from central control and planning and the increasing participation of non-state actors, particularly in the education sector (Tukdeo 2010: 1). Therefore, co-development can be seen as contributing to the NGOization of development. Through this NGOization, a greater number of schools have been privatized and managed by non-profit organizations, many of which receive funding from the diaspora. This trend makes studying the space occupied by diaspora organizations in providing aid to the education sector especially important.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE), passed in 2009, is the most recent legislation relating to education. The act calls for free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 and requires monitoring of schools, limiting class sizes, and improving school infrastructure. Calls for this bill were strong among a coalition of NGOs, donor agencies, and diasporic groups (Tukdeo 2010: 94). This legislation included setting standards for private education and has started to become enforced, raising concerns for schools that do not comply with guidelines set forth in the RTE, particularly those that serve under-served or marginalized communities. The RTE places more emphasis on board affiliation. The Central Board of Secondary Education or the State Board provide curricular guidelines and administer examinations. They essentially confer academic qualifications (LaDousa 2014: 12). The enforcement of the RTE has raised challenges for schools that do not organize under traditional means, especially the non-formal education sector. Many of the schools founded by NGOs and volunteer organizations, which are part of this sector, often reach populations that are excluded from

board-certified educational institutions. These are also schools that provide more flexibility for students, charging low or no fees, allowing students to not wear uniforms, providing materials for students, and in some cases, allowing for flexible schooling hours (LaDousa 2014: 12). Many of these schools are under threat to be shut down because of the provisions outlined in the RTE. For example, Asai supports a school in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh<sup>11</sup> in North India that provides education and tutoring to the children of migrant laborers, as well as evening classes for students who work alongside their parents or engage in childcare activities while their parents work. Under the RTE, these schools would either have to shut down or register with the State and Central boards, which would then require the schools to comply with the norms set by State and Central education policies, including the elimination of on-demand examinations and establishment of regular school hours (Tiwari 2015).

As will be discussed, the majority of education projects funded by diaspora organization tend to be to aided or unaided private schools. An ASER survey conduct in 2013 found that there has been a dramatic shift to private enrollment in rural areas. Of course, this is a trend that might very well reflect the failure of government schools to provide adequate learning outcomes (Madhav 2013: 1). In fact, research done in 1999 among rural poor and disadvantaged communities found that parents make sacrifices to send their children to private schools because they have become disillusioned with government schools. This disillusionment is due to the low quality of education, absenteeism, and lack of resources for the schools (Tooley et al. 2007: 540). A study

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<sup>11</sup> This project is outlined in Appendix B.

conducted by Tooley et al. (2007) found that 60 percent of the schools serving notified slums<sup>12</sup> in Hyderabad were private, unaided schools, accounting for 65 percent of student enrollment, and that many of these schools were also unrecognized (543). A majority of the funding for these schools came from charitable trusts or organizations (Tooley et al. 2007: 547).

### **Diaspora Approaches to Funding Education**

The earliest Indian immigrants in the United States became involved in funding schools in India. For example, Khalsa Middle School in the Punjab was founded by funds from diasporic Punjabis in 1923. Significant funds came from the Sikh American Educational Society (SAES), based in Stockton, California. The organization continued to support the school long after its founding, until 1952 when the school was officially handed over to the government (Walton-Roberts 2005: 138). The SAES promoted its work among the Punjabi-American community by highlighting the ways that individuals could give back to Punjab and the cause of education. Giving to education was of particular importance because, as a report from the SAES stated, “we all know that education is essential for the development of any nation, only education is the way which can open the doors of progress.” (SAES Report, quoted in Walton-Roberts 2005: 140). At that time, education was also seen as a key requirement to successfully overthrow British rule and obtain independence (Walton-Roberts 2005: 141). Many supporters gave amounts that far exceeded their own abilities to give, considering many were farmers and faced economic

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Census of India, a notified slum is an area that has been recognized by the municipal authorities as a high density area (Census of India, Accessed online August 25, 2018).

hardships. This highlights the importance of connecting to and supporting the homeland, while also creating a new home in the United States and reinforcing their connection to Punjab.

Diasporic organizations funding education in India range from alumni associations for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), large multi-million dollar foundations like the Pratham Foundation, to voluntary organizations, such as those in this study, supporting primary education. Alumni networks, especially for IITs, raise significant amounts of funds for elite universities in India. In fact, their fundraising far outstrips efforts for elementary education. This mirrors the Indian government's increasing focus on improving colleges and universities through private funding to create flexible and hyper mobile IT workers (Walton-Roberts 2005: 136). Those organizations that focus on pre-college education are built on the assumptions that knowledge has been central to India's growth, existing education structures cannot provide quality education, and civic action is needed to lead the change (Tukdeo 2010: 13). Diaspora organizations are seen as the solution to a number of problems and engage in a space that is very different from larger multilateral agencies.

As India turned more to the diaspora option to fund development projects, overseas Indians have become involved in policy interventions in education, including structural support, capacity building, teacher training, and policy frameworks like the RTE. Each of the groups in this study hold different views of education and ways to reform or organize education. They are small players in the field of education, as compared to larger international philanthropic organizations or international aid agencies, but they represent the growing role of diasporic social action.



## *Shikshan*

Shikshan has linkages to religious-right groups in India and the United States. Volunteers with Shikshan are more involved with fundraising for schools, rather than partnering with specific individual schools as is done in Asai and Vikas Sangathan. According to Shikshan's website, they are currently serving 1.5 million children in 53,000 single-teacher schools, with 70,000 people trained to be teachers (*Acharya*) and school workers (*Karyakarta*), all of whom are recruited from the local area (Annual Report 2015: 3). In 2014, Shikshan distributed 4.7 million dollars to their partners in India. The Shikshan model emphasizes scalable, replicable education models that are stripped bare to just the basic elements of education, functional literacy. Their education model involves setting up one-teacher schools, training one person, with at least an 8<sup>th</sup> standard education, to lead a school and teach a set curriculum. Volunteer fundraisers for Shikshan tout the efficacy of these schools, stating that the schools can be run for \$1 a day. Each \$365 donated to Shikshan is one school funded for a year. Hemant, one of the early founders of Shikshan, recounted that in some cases, the classes take place under a tree, which was "all that was needed." Most of the schools are in tribal, remote areas of India. Tribals, or *Adivasis*, are one of the most marginalized communities in India. For Shikshan, the measure of success for these schools are functional literacy levels and the level of moral education (Tata Dhan Academy Study 2011). In a study by an independent research group, researchers found that Shikshan students lagged behind other schools in mathematics, with an average score of 47% for L1 and 43% for L2, with 60% being a passing grade ("Aspiring Minds" 2013).

Volunteers view the work with schools as a social investment, rather than in terms of a donor-client relationship or partnership. The volunteers in Shikshan felt that the money they raised was an investment in the sense that the education the students would receive would pay off for their future economic success. This language is reflective of the background of many of the volunteers with Shikshan as many are also involved with the major Indian or South Asian entrepreneur associations. There is no evidence to support the claims that these schools have had such payoffs. However, Shikshan's annual report often highlights stories of students that have made it to institutions of higher education, including Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or universities in the United States.

Volunteers may develop a relationship with a particular school if they participate in a *van yatra*, translated to literally mean "forest pilgrimage," harkening to Hindu mythology of "sadhus and sanyasis traveling through deep overgrowths to attain enlightenment and salvation" ([www.FTS.org/van\\_yatra](http://www.FTS.org/van_yatra), Accessed November 10, 2014), but in particular, Ram's journey in the forest in the *Ramayana*. During the *van yatra*, volunteers visit a Shikshan school and spend two to three days in the village. Respondents who had taken this tour described it as a festive occasion and being honored in a "royal fashion." The *van yatra* will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, but it is important to note it here that it served as a means for volunteers to be further drawn into the work of the organization.

Shikshan's focus on tribal areas has been a controversial part of their work, given their close ties to groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has been active in reconversion of *Adivasis* to Hinduism. This act of reconversion has been framed as allowing individuals to return to their "original" religious affiliation (Menon 2010: 55).

According to Ramesh Modi, President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Chhattisgarh, the

schools set up by Shikshan are important to “give lessons on Hindu culture and religion besides the normal academic course” (Dhar, March 18, 2004). The schools were also seen as a response to Christian missionaries who often “provided the four “As’: *Akshar* (education), *Anna* (food grains), *Arogya* (health), and *Aradhana Sthal* (place of worship),” but often were accused of converting tribals. The Hinduization of *Adivasis* included celebration of the Ganesh festival, using “*Ram Ram*” to greet each other, and other measures to “churn out totally Hinduised products who will be nationalists to the core” (Dhar, March 18, 2004). This issue gained attention again in 2015 with the *ghar vapasi* (Return Home) program run in tribal areas by the RSS to “reconvert” *Adivasis* to Hinduism. Among Shikshan volunteers, there was some degree of awareness about this issue. Some respondents even expected question about this topic and brought it up preemptively in interviews.

### *Asai*

Asai’s stated mission is “focusing on basic education in the belief that education is a critical requisite for socio-economic change” (Asai Website, Accessed August 22, 2016). While their definition of education is broad-based, including teacher training or rights-based education, such as learning how to file a request for public information, most of the projects that they support are primary up to high school private schools run by NGOs based in India. In 2014, Asai supported 185 projects in India, distributing 2.85 million dollars. Of course, this is a small fraction of their total assets, which are close to 9.1 million dollars, a point that has drawn some criticism from volunteers who felt that more money should be going to the projects in India. Part of the difficulty in distributing these funds was due to

the bandwidth of the chapters and their volunteers to take on additional projects. Excess funds went into organizational reserves. The chapter in this study distributed a little over \$600,000 in 2014 (Asai Website, Accessed September 2, 2018). Each project that is funded by the chapter is paired with a project steward who works closely with the project partners to gather information about the project, present it to the chapter, and answer any questions that the chapter might have about the project. In this way, volunteers become personally involved with a specific project in India and learn about the different challenges facing each of the schools. Asai, in some ways, tries to imagine itself not as a donor organization, but a partner organization.

The central governance of Asai has expressed concerns that it is setting up a parallel system of education to the government schools. This concern has become more pronounced as the RTE has taken effect in India. There have been internal discussions of whether Asai should continue to fund schools in the manner that they have been doing or serve more as a watchdog organization, aiding communities in reporting RTE violations or filing Right to Information requests to remedy the situation. Asai's main governing body in India has started to sever ties with schools that are not RTE compliant. Some of the logic for this decision has been that since the amount of funding that Asai sends to India pales in comparison to the budget for education allotted by the Indian government, Asai should be more of a support organization for individuals using the Right to Information to ensure RTE compliance or seeking to address other educational issues, especially those impacting marginalized communities. As a result of the RTE, many chapters are also working closely with the government or schools that were certified under the NIOS. Other areas that Asai is considering including is training for teachers and reaching out to children that would fall

outside the purview of government schools, such as those that drop out of school, work with their families, or have families that are migrants. Examples of these projects can be seen in Appendix B.

### *Vikas Sangathan*

Vikas Sangathan differs from the other two organizations in this study in that it does not solely focus on education funding, though it does work with education projects in India. Vikas Sangathan operates in tandem with a number of activist networks in India, like the National Association of People's Movements, and works with "struggles on the ground." Vikas Sangathan's programs in education include a number of informal education programs, such as rights-based education or topical issues related to health, agriculture, or environmental monitoring. Education funding for Vikas Sangathan cuts across these different realms; in fact, they justify addressing many issues, and not just education, as follows:

The problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disease, social inequalities, corruption and the dwindling of natural resources reinforce one another. One problem leads to the other and feeds on another. Therefore the solutions to these problems must be interconnected, just like the problems themselves. Thus solutions must involve initiatives in diverse areas like education, creation of livelihoods, health-care, demanding of accountability, environmental awareness, simple living, water-harvesting, alternate energy and conservation of forests (Vikas Sangathan Conference proceedings, May 25, 2013).

As such, education is just one area in which Vikas Sangathan works, along with agriculture, health, livelihoods, natural resource management, women's empowerment, and social justice issues. Some volunteers with Vikas Sangathan have mentioned that, often, because they do not focus on just one issue, they have challenges framing their approach to

development as it cannot be encapsulated into a singular area of focus in the same way that Asai can frame their work.

Vikas Sangathan-supported education projects include funds to NGOs that create curricula for schools to teach about caste and gender inequality in Mumbai, an organization in rural Andhra Pradesh that provides education about rights granted with different types of legislation like the Right to Information, the Forest Rights Act, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and funding to improve school infrastructure, such as placing solar panels at a school in the Himalayas, in a very remote area of Himachal Pradesh. Funding for a project such as the latter is particularly unique, as many of the other educational non-profits in the Indian diaspora do not fund infrastructure-related projects.

One of the largest projects supported by Vikas Sangathan, and by the chapter in this study, is a series of schools in Tamil Nadu focused on remedial math, science, Tamil, and English education in rural areas that are predominately Dalit and tribal. This education project has become so large, in fact, that there are three NGOs involved with administering schools in different districts of Tamil Nadu. For many of the education projects Vikas Sangathan supports, there is crossover with Asai-supported projects. Both support the education project in Tamil Nadu, described above, as well as an organization in West Bengal that provides basic primary education and education on high-salinity agricultural practices to empower these communities towards self-sufficiency. In fact, there were instances of project partners from NGOs funded by both organizations coming to the United States and giving talks at both local chapters during their visits or coordinated public events hosted by both organizations. For example, the chapters in this study hosted Obalesh Bheemappa, who works with Themate (organization outlined in Appendix B). In

this jointly hosted talk, he discussed the challenges facing Themate in addressing caste discrimination against Dalits.

### **Why is Education the Key?**

Education is one of the most salient markers of Indians who have migrated to the United States and part and parcel of their affluent status. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that supporting education has such an intense draw for many of the volunteers in this study. A convergence can be seen in the work of these organizations around issues of education. This isomorphic change occurs if a model exists that institutional entrepreneurs actively seek to imitate because they are interpreted as institutional solutions to problems faced (Beckert 2010: 155). This can be seen in the labeling of techniques as best practices or in the provision of frames for decision-making on how to resolve a problem and find solutions (Beckert 2010: 156). In this present research, education is seen as one of the main inputs for development, given the frame of reference for many volunteers and their view that education was the differentiator that allowed them to be successful, economically and socially.

Many respondents mentioned that education was the key to future success in life and bettering the lives of people economically, to get out of poverty, get a job, improve their families, and achieve other aspects of personal growth and development. Some respondents even went as far as to say that education in India was the *one* issue that was key to spurring development. These respondents held a very instrumental view of education, as a means to economic growth and betterment, rather than the human development outcomes that could result from education, such as improved health, access to

more resources, ability to advocate for rights, and other forms of empowerment. Dreze and Sen (1995), similarly, found that education serves four key roles: first, being educated in and of itself has value; second, it plays an instrumental personal role in securing employment; third, it enables an individual to engage in informed decision-making and discussion, and fourth, education provides social interaction and broadens horizons, an instrumental process role (1995: 14-15).

Respondents reflected on the role of education in their own journey to the United States and as a key to social and economic attainment. Their education opened up doors of opportunity. In a posting on social media, two participants in Vikas Sangathan's marathon training program, highlighted that in honor of their wedding, they would be raising funds to support one of Vikas Sangathan's key partners. In their reasoning for choosing the partner they did, the couple wrote,

One of the main reasons for where we are today is because of education. We know people whose lives have changed because of that, and want as much of it as possible. Growing up in India, we have always believed in the importance of primary education, and now can see it as a major contributor in a nation's growth and development. When we decided to get married, we made it a point to make a part of our gifts work towards educating the next generation. Hope that this contribution will go create opportunities to the younger, less fortunate ones and helps India be the nation it was meant to be.

Here, they not only highlighted the role education played in their own personal journeys, but also the role it plays in the journey for India as a nation. Hemant, one of the founding members of Shikshan, also saw the instrumental purpose of education, particularly for the Indian community,

The whole goal is education because that is what brought Indians to the US. America allowed us to come here because of education. We did not come as refugees. We were allowed to come on the merits of education.... Education



matters the most, and for that reason, our focus is on this cause and bringing underprivileged kids in India out of poverty.

Social class also plays a major role in migrating to the United States; many of the volunteers I interviewed for this study seemed to ignore the role of their own class privileges in enabling their immigration to this United States. Many viewed their path to immigration as a linear stream, resulting from their hard work and academic performance. Therefore, they believed that making education available and more accessible could be a solution to the pressing needs of the poor.

As a related motivation, some research participants reported on how their own struggles to get an education and their relatively disadvantaged backgrounds inspired them to be involved with education programs. These volunteers felt that compared to their colleagues, they faced a struggle to obtain their education. It is interesting to note that this was a sentiment expressed by respondents who did not come to the US for studies, with an F1 visa, but rather came to the US through an H1B, or work visa. For example, Nivi, a newer Asai volunteer, had come to the United States through an internal transfer in her company. She became particularly passionate about education issues because of the struggles she faced in advancing at each stage of education,

There was always this struggle of if I should work or get an education. There were even times I was working and going to school, which as you know for most Indians, is not very common. I kept thinking well, I'm good enough with computer, I could just stop school, work, and help my family. But I decided to keep going. And look where I am now. So now I think that if I can allow someone the opportunity to keep going in their education, they won't have to have the same struggles that I have had.

Participants who did not come from major urban areas, in a similar fashion, attributed their successes, relative to those in their community, to their education. A

common theme in their narratives was about how they were one of the few people from their hometown to advance in their studies, get a successful job, and support their families. In these cases, they felt that what made the difference between them and the rest of the village was their education, without acknowledging privileges that may have been afforded to them. Another Asai volunteer, Arnab, was acutely aware of class issues he saw during his schooling. Arnab attended government schools, and many of the students in his class could not afford the fees even in the government school and would drop out. Certainly for these students, higher education was out of the question. Once he went to engineering college, Arnab felt,

I could understand a little what my friends went through. When I was in engineering college there were some very rich kids with BMWs, so I felt what some of my friends went through in my school days. I could begin to understand the pain of different levels- which is everywhere in this world.

While the experience of growing up in a school with disadvantaged children had an impression on Arnab, it was the relative disparity with his classmates at engineering college that made him more aware of the ways class and education interact.

Of course, personal experiences and economic reasons were not the only factors that figured into supporting education. Some respondents reported that they were interested in education because of a general interest in children's issues. Those who cited this as a reason for their involvement usually volunteered with other organizations that were focused on children, like Boys and Girls Club or afterschool tutoring programs in the local community. For Deepak, being involved with Shikshan was part of his larger to be involved with causes for children. He was also involved with a number of organizations working on children's health issues in Colombia and Mexico. Deepak was interested in

supporting education through Shikshan because he felt it was a powerful medium through which to make an impact in the future of children: “[Shikshan] is truly giving to kids...why shouldn’t kids not get the chance to have an education, which is fundamentally a right.” More cynically, Suresh, a volunteer with Asai, stated that supporting causes for children is more attractive for many volunteers because, “it is much easier to give money for children. Adults are seen as being responsible for the positions they are in, whereas children are not.” This certainly harkens to notions of personal responsibility and blaming the poor for being poor, a common refrain in neoliberal economics.

Supporting education held a special place in the ability to give back to India. A fraught issue for many immigrants is the decision not to return and the impact that has on the home country. Giving back to India was a key part of their involvement in these organizations, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. A few even saw their involvement as a training for their return back to India, where they hoped to set up NGOs and other social service entities. But overall, a key aspect for involvement was the ability to engage in trans-local politics and effect social change. This has been described in terms of a brain gain:

Earlier they would look at [NRIs] as *brain drain*. ‘They all go away.’ Then, I guess, the first thing they saw was ‘Oh! Money is coming back. It’s a good thing. We’ve got to listen to these guys because dollar’s hard currency, hard cash coming back. Then they started seeing technology coming back. Then they actually started moving back. The brain gain started happening.... (quoted from Naujoks 2013: 301).

Another line of reasoning, of course, was that while in the host country, it was the duty of the migrants to send money back home to India, and, by being in the US, they were able to contribute in a way that they would not be able to if they were in India. In a study done to

investigate the motivations of migrants engaging in their home countries, national loyalty and the desire to help “with issues connected to [their] country’s development received the highest number of ‘very high importance’ responses” (Naujoks 2013: 330). The list included emotional attachment, higher satisfaction from charity than from consumption for personal benefit, and the perception that their image as Indian Americans was linked with the status of India (Naujoks 2013: 330). In a seminar hosted by Shikshan to discuss technology and education in India, there were some modifications to this sentiment. Rupali, one of the chapter leaders for Shikshan, said during the event, “I earn in dollars. My \$1 can buy so much more in India than it can here. Imagine that, and multiple[multiply] it.” Volunteers and donors felt they could make more of an impact for India being in the United States, donating dollars. This ability to have a greater impact and give in a more meaningful way was a source of pride.

A small subsection of respondents were second-generation Indian-Americans who were all volunteers with Shikshan. All mentioned getting involved with Shikshan as one of many ways for them to connect with the Indian community, but that was not a key part of their involvement. In fact, many of these respondents got involved with Shikshan with their family members. Their growing interest to stay involved with Shikshan came from trips to India with their families, and specifically going on a *van yatra*. Ajay became more involved with Shikshan while he was in high school as a result of a trip he took to India: “I became interested in education after I saw the poverty in India during my trips with my family, and I thought something could be done to fix that.” In Gautam’s case, the interest in supporting education causes in India stemmed from his parent’s trajectory,

Both of my parents came to the United States because of education. My father's dad died when he was young, and he grew up with very little. His ticket to the U.S. was education. He got into IIT, got into Georgia Tech, and became a professor.... Education allowed him to grow up and come out of poverty.

### **“We’re Going About it all Wrong...”**

Even though a great deal of focus is on education, some participants were critical of the approach their organizations took to addressing education issues in India, or of an over-emphasis on education as a cure-all to the development woes facing India. Education certainly can transform lives, but other factors can mediate the access individuals have to the freedoms that are provided by education (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 3).

One of the biggest limitations of these organizations, because they are voluntary, is the inability to engage in serious introspection on the goals and mission of the organization in relation to the work they are supporting. Part of this is because of the lack of time, lack of expertise on the issues, the inability to evaluate projects more thoroughly, or just the lack of institutional memory due to volunteer turnover. Shashank, a volunteer with Vikas Sangathan, remarked, “even if there is introspection, no one wants to question supporting education.” Of course, this highlights one of the fundamental flaws of the organizations: by being voluntary organizations, they are at the mercy of the availability of volunteers and the resources they can devote to the work of the organization. It also prevents reflection on how the work really is addressing the issues facing education in India or how the projects can be an effective solution.

An additional concern that was expressed was that funding NGOs to provide education meant that government schools are not held accountable nor under pressure to

improve. In areas that are extremely remote, there is no impetus for the government to establish services. This concern was raised in relation to one project supported by Asai in Tamil Nadu, which provided additional teachers to supplement instruction in government schools. In particular, the aim was to bring the student-to-teacher ratio down and provide more interactive instruction. The concern voiced by Asai was that in supporting this project, the government schools would be absolved of their responsibilities to conform to RTE guidelines, such as limiting classroom sizes.

Critical respondents were also concerned that the education programs advocated for by diaspora organizations did not serve the local communities effectively. The programs instead reflected the organizational membership's caste and class privileges. Suresh, a volunteer with Asai, felt that, in a way, the organization did a disservice to some of the schools they funded in India because the curriculum reflected the education most of the volunteers in Asai had received,

Why would we neglect to teach children who are in farming communities or are *Adivasis* subjects that are pertinent to them? Yes, science, math, reading are all-important, but what about other subjects that are part of the realities of these kids' future careers?

In a similar vein, Deepak, from Shikshan, shared that one of the challenges in doing education work in the areas where Shikshan had schools was the lack of accompanying infrastructure, like basic healthcare, that prevented children from learning.

Sumit, an Asai volunteer in his 30s who worked for a large IT firm, had been involved with Vikas Sangathan prior to being involved with Asai. His biggest critique of Asai was that it came dangerously close to advocating for "cookie-cutter education." From

Sumit's perspective, education that was meaningful to those that were being served by these projects needed to incorporate local ecology and local knowledge; otherwise,

If we promote this same education to everyone, regardless of their location, we come dangerously close to destroying any bit of local knowledge. If we don't preserve that local knowledge, and instill in these children modern, urban education, we are creating "in between" people that are here nor there. Organizations like Asai are creating in-between people who have psychological and pathological issues because they neither fit in rural India or urban India.

Going beyond economic goals to also include human development issues in relation to education was another major concern voiced. As an organization, Asai has even gone as far as to suggest that they should perhaps expand their scope beyond education to focus more broadly on human development issues and incorporate socio-economic factors. There has been a push from academia and international governmental organization like the United Nations, to change the parameters of how development is defined. This trend defines development not just in economic terms, like GDP per capita or percent of the population in poverty. Many of these measures are reflected in the UN Human Development Index (HDI) measure. In relation to education, these measures consist of achievement towards universal primary education and gender equality between boys and girls, but also measures of adult literacy and student enrollment (Naujoks 2013: 70). The HDI also ranks a number of other measures such as life expectancy and other health-related measures. Pradeep, one of the founders of Asai, broke with the organization because of his desire to focus beyond education on other social inequalities,

There is this assumption that education can change society. That if you provide education you can get rid of all types of social problems. This is a naïve assumption. Social situations are more complicated than that. If anything, the education system as it is set up in India creates more

inequalities.... by doing the work we are doing, we are supporting an education system that is discriminatory.

Pradeep split with Asai not only because of their views of development and education's relationship to it but also because of growing dissatisfaction with the lack of political action or will in the organization. In a similar vein, many Asai project partners have urged volunteers and the organization to shift their focus from a technocratic view of education to a more nuanced socio-political understanding of education, looking holistically at the situation surrounding a school. As the founder of a rural school in Uttar Pradesh shared at Asai's national conference in 2015, "providing funds for education might not solve the issues because there are many challenges at a community level which need to be addressed as well." In particular, beyond the classroom, the students at this school in Uttar Pradesh struggled with poverty and caste discrimination, which cannot be eliminated just with education.

Shashank, a volunteer with Vikas Sangathan, has echoed this "disenchantment" with education as a cure-all for the issues facing India. Shashank went as far as to say:

I no longer even raise my hand or participate in votes for education projects. I believe there are much bigger problems of social justice to fix. There needs to be a 'course correction' before we think about working on education.

These concerns echo general criticisms of diaspora groups, in that they fail to really address the major concerns on the ground or the glaring social problems in education.

Instead, their interventions focus on a linear progression of society and development, with the notion that education will open the door to economic opportunity, a path out of poverty, and the overall betterment of society.

## **Conclusion**



The Indian diaspora has increasingly become a funder of services once provided and funded by the government. Many of these services are key components of human development measures, like primary education. As this chapter has highlighted, education is privileged as an approach because it figures largely in the trajectory of volunteers in immigrating to the United States. For many of these volunteers, supporting education is an unquestionable social good; education was the key to their success, and it is the key to realizing a developed India.

While supporting education is a cornerstone of promoting development, there are a number of concerns in privileging education as a solution to underdevelopment. For the participants in this study, education is an unquestionable social good, but this is filtered through their experiences, having access to abundant educational resources from private schools with English instruction, tuition and coaching classes, and classes to prepare them for the entrance exams for institutions of higher learning. The volunteers in this study, and in the Indian American community in general, are a unique group both in the United States and in India, in terms of their educational and economic successes.

Therefore, despite what seems like a clear-cut link between education and development, there are barriers to access to education, such as class, caste, and geographic location, which prevent education alone from being able to address social inequalities. These factors also serve as barriers to other social and economic attainment, beyond education. These were some of the major critique of volunteers that were more critical of the “education only” approach to addressing development in India. In particular, the schools supported by these three organizations serve some of the most marginalized

populations in India, *Adivasis* and Dalits in rural areas. One must question the motivations behind the work affecting these communities.

On the one hand, the type of education provided at these institutions hardly put the status quo in danger or provide a fully adequate education for the students served by these schools, especially for the one-teacher schools supported by Shikshan. The quality of the schools funded by diaspora organizations, as compared to the private schools many of the volunteers in this study, is stark. This differential schooling has increased communal and class divisions and erased the benefits conferred by just raising literacy rates (Sundar 2004: 1607). On the other hand, these schools inculcate certain ideologies. In particular, since 1984, the BJP has sought to elevate its status with Dalits and *Adivasis*, who have generally been alienated by *Hindutva* rhetoric, to garner electoral support. In the documentary *Jai Bhim Comrade*, which highlighted Dalit politics in Mumbai, filmmaker Anand Patwardhan (2011) finds that over the 14 years of making the film, there has been a significant “hinduization” of Dalits, leading to electoral gains for the BJP. Shikshan’s work, in particular, should be understood within that context. The methods of instruction seek not only to impart rudimentary knowledge but also indoctrination with nationalist ideological objectives, “saffronizing” education, ranging from an oversimplification of medieval Indian history as a long series of Muslim invasions, excluding discussions of hierarchies based on castes, to increasing the “essentials of Indian culture” from 10 percent to 25 percent of the curricular focus (Reddy 2011: 415). Students essentially are schooled in the vision of Indian espoused by the BJP.

Given the resources at their disposal, it is beyond the scope or ability of diaspora organizations to completely tackle these issues; rather it should be understood as a caveat

to the work they do. It should also not be ignored that because of their work in education, there are many ideological implications, as outlined above. As will be seen in the next chapter, these organizations serve to give visibility to the issues and partners they work with in India and engage with the Indian community. In this way, these organizations define for the Indian American community the development needs of India, from their specific perspective and political lens.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SPACES OF LEARNING AND BELONGING

Voluntary organizations in the Indian American community play an important role in creating spaces for immigrant inclusion and social action, whether it is a cultural or regional association, a faith-based organization, or centered on services for the Indian community. The functions of these organizations run the gamut: providing community programming, serving as advocates for the community, or maintaining a direct link between the communities in the United States to India. Institutions are at the core of a diaspora community, providing expressions of community and culture (Henry and Mohan 2003: 615). The organizations in this study are unique in that their work is primarily focused on raising funds for projects in India, but, certainly, for the individuals involved in these organizations, they also serve as a means through which they maintain connections to their homeland, India, while living in their adopted home, the United States.

Because of the voluntary nature of these organizations, there are several challenges that they need to balance and a degree of learning that must take place for volunteers to engage effectively. Volunteers must first understand how a non-profit organization functions, learn laws and rules about their management, and, at the same time, become informed on socio-political issues in India so they can engage with project partners. One hurdle for these organizations is socializing members to the functions and bureaucracy of running a non-profit organization. This is compounded by a number of factors: many members do not have prior experience in the non-profit sector, especially in the US context, nor do many of the volunteers have extensive histories of volunteerism, even back in India.

When an individual joins any organization, whether as part of paid work or as a volunteer, they often commit themselves to the set norms and rules of that organization.

Organizational culture consists of many key features: long standing rules of thumb, special language and ideologies that edit a member's everyday experience, and shared standards for critical aspects of the work to be accomplished (van Maanen and Schein 1979: 209).

Organizational culture develops through long-running processes of social interactions and is a result of tradition, history, and the functioning of the organization as a social system. Social interactions within the organization become a unique experience for members, and from that, a unique set of meanings emerge (Nebojsa 2015: 445). The norms and values of organizations are further complicated by external factors (Schein 2010: 4), and in the case of this research, global, transnational and ethnic issues. The other challenge for these organizations is how to impart these norms to volunteers who can walk away at any time. Socialization, in this context, must balance between the needs of the organization and the motivations of the volunteers. Indeed, organizational socialization takes place within a constantly changing environment, wherein the means to satisfy both collective and individual needs evolves (van Maanen and Schein 1979: 214). One of the important outcomes of this socialization is a commitment to the organization with varying levels of attachment: affective or emotional; continuance, the cost of leaving is high; and normative, feelings of obligation (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008: 69). Another key outcome is building on the volunteer's social capacity or ability to work with others and organize publicly, building capacity for civic life (Eikenberry 2009: 89). This is an educational process that covers the running of the organization, learning about the issues being supported, and empowering members to feel as if they have power to make a difference (Eikenberry 2009: 90).

Second, the volunteers have to better understand the context in which the work is being done. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, many volunteers came from privileged, urban backgrounds in India. Often, they do not have any direct experience or exposure to some of the issues their organizations are seeking to address. Finally, the challenges of building organizational cohesion also need to balance the democratic needs of the organization, and at the same time, ensure members have a sense of ownership of the work. Because of the drive for control and consent within organizations, they can also be seen as cooperative systems, where organizations have to balance between seeing individuals in terms of their roles and the individual's desire to not be depersonalized (Selznick 1948: 26). Within largely voluntary organizations this can lead to a strain between accomplishing goals and preserving democratic and discursive practices. The organizations in this study are balancing the demands of the organization to quickly process projects and send funds to India, but at the same time, provide an enriching experience for volunteers; they operate at the intersection of philanthropy and volunteerism.

### **Training Volunteers in the Functions of Non-Profits and Civic Life**

Voluntary organizations have been conceptualized as “laboratories for democracy” where members can learn civic virtues like trust, compromise, reciprocity, and engage in democratic dialogue and organization, as well as connect with the larger common good (Eikenberry 2007: 858). They include social, educational, and engagement opportunities for members and connect communities (Eikenberry 2009:2). For individuals, involvement in these organizations can provide personal development, and in a general sense can

provide a safe space for experimentation and questioning, provide for leadership opportunities, represent crucial pathways to participation, and nurture skills in building relationships within and external to the organization (Deschenes, McLaughlin, and O'Donoghue 2006). Furthermore, involvement in voluntary organizations can provide exposure to learn social skills and develop networks which may lead to other forms of civic participation (Ecklund et al. 2013: 373). Application of these skills can range from running meetings, speaking in public, writing letters, organizing projects, and debating controversial topics civilly (Putnam 2000: 338). These organizations allow for experimentation to learn social and civic skills, without detrimental consequences. They function as a "community of practice," a space to learn about the functions of a non-profit organization (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 8). This perspective adds an analytical dimension that is often overlooked in the study of immigrant organizations and highlights the processual aspects of organizations and social practice. The "community of practice" concept sheds light on the role of organizations in establishing shared understandings about their work and what it means for their community (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2008: 198). Attention is drawn to how individuals obtain knowledge about participation and become agents in their own process of civic incorporation. Learning is not just the acquisition of knowledge but also a process of social participation (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2008: 217).

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identified three parameters along which socialization must occur in an organization. The first parameter is in terms of the function of the organization; what are the various tasks performed by members and how do they fit with the overall goals of the organization. Second is the hierarchical distribution; how are

functions assigned in the organization and who is responsible for what. Very decentralized organizations, as the ones in this research, will often have very few hierarchies (224). The third dimension is inclusion within the organization. Van Maanen and Schein saw this dimension as a continuum of members moving between two poles of “on the periphery” or “center of things” (229). While they saw this factor more in terms of the individual’s contributions to the organization, it can also be thought of in terms of the individual’s sense of belonging and affinity to the organization. In the discussion to follow, these dimensions certainly come into play when looking at the various ways each organization facilitates educating volunteers about the functions of a non-profit organization and issues in India. It is through this process, of first joining the organization and then receiving training in non-profit functions, that volunteers in turn become not only owners of the organization and its work, but also negotiate their relationship to India through their work and membership in their organization.

Over the course of conducting research for this study, all of the volunteers I interviewed, except for two, were employed in the IT sector and did not have significant non-profit experience, either as a volunteer or as a donor. A few had been involved in organizations in India but just as a one-time volunteering opportunity with their college or workplace. Becoming a volunteer in these organizations often is the first exposure individuals have had to the non-profit sector. For instance, Ajit, a volunteer with Asai, explains,

This really is the first time I am working with a non-profit organization. While I was in India, I always wanted to get involved but just never did. I think when I found out about Asai, it really was the best combination of things I was looking for in an organization.



Anand, a Vikas Sangathan volunteer, did some volunteer work in India, but he felt, “I was just a self-important, self-satisfied middle-class Indian that would just do monthly charity to a local organization and that was it.” Through his involvement in Vikas Sangathan, Anand shared that he better understood the responsibility of volunteering and the need for longer-term involvement to truly work collaboratively with partners in India and understand the context of the work.

Those volunteers who had been involved in the non-profit sector in some capacity had a much easier time adjusting to becoming volunteers with their chosen organization. Sheela found that she naturally slipped into volunteering with Shikshan because prior to her involvement, she had hosted dance events that raised funds for various organizations, including Shikshan. By doing these events, she found “I can easily be involved in community service and bring people together for doing good.” In Sheela’s case, she had already been very active in the local Indian community through cultural events, and becoming a volunteer with Shikshan was a nearly seamless transition. Radha, another volunteer with Shikshan, was extensively involved with a number of Indian community organizations prior to joining Shikshan, which also enabled her to easily activate social networks for fundraising. She had been active with local regional association for Uttar Pradesh and a Brahmin caste-based association. So how does an organization that has to be subjected to all the standards of non-profit organizations, like audits, budgeting and governance, ensure that their members, with little exposure or knowledge to non-profit organizations, understand processes and procedures that the organization must adhere to?

Much of the learning in these organizations is informal, a “learning by doing” process, working through the unfamiliar to understand how the organization functions.

This form of socialization is similar to the processes observed by individuals in Louis' (1980) work where surprise, defined as difference between an individual's expectations and their subsequent experiences, leads to sense making. This surprise can come from assumptions on how the organization works, expectations that are met or not met, or difficulties in being able to forecast new experiences. All forms of surprise require adaptation, which often leads to learning how the organization works and internalizing the associated norms and processes. This is seen across the board in research on volunteer socialization; volunteers often face ambiguity and much of their training is "on the job" (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008: 68).

Within organizations, the various steps of involvement also provided leadership training and education. The first step, in many cases, to becoming a member of the organization was attending meetings and learning the lingo. A logical next step was to become informed about the central issues and challenges with each project. More traditional non-profit concerns, like fundraising and financials, were not as overtly discussed. Except in rare cases, such as disclosing what the break-even point might be for a major event or the specific financials for a project proposal, chapter officers and more seasoned volunteers carefully guided many of the financial practices to ensure all the standards were met for any potential audits or donor questions that might arise. However, this failure to discuss the finer details of non-profit accounting could create some issues within organizations. For example, Asai long claimed to be "zero overhead," without many volunteers understanding how overhead in non-profits is measured. Many members assumed that if an event, like a concert or dance program, allowed them to break-even and raise funds, then the event was "zero overhead." However, the costs of hosting an event,

such as rental fees, marketing materials, and the logistical costs, are all counted as overhead costs.

Outside of learning by doing, occasionally more formal modes of socialization, like new volunteer orientations, were held when the number of new volunteers attending meetings hit a critical mass. The focus of these orientations was on the project cycle, start to finish, and what is required at the chapter level to approve funding for a project. Annually, Shikshan held regional workshops throughout the United States, where two to three chapters of Shikshan met for half-day retreat of discussion and brainstorming. As part of this event, a short orientation for new members was given, providing an overview of Shikshan's work, a year in review, and a preview for the coming year. For Asai and Vikas Sangathan, the process starts with vetting an organization's proposal for the year, the budget for the project, presenting this information to the chapter, and following up on any questions that arose at the chapter meeting with the project partner. Overall, just this portion of the project stewardship could span over 2-3 meetings, between follow up questions, debates and discussions in the chapter, and finally, a vote of all the members on whether to fund the project. Once that is done, the project steward must fill out and upload all the necessary forms for the central body of the organization to distribute the funds. Only half of the approved funds are sent at first, and 6-months later, the project steward will present to the chapter on the progress of the partner organization and how they have used the funding from the chapter. This 6-month review is a required next step before the rest of the funds are approved. Once the funding year is over, the cycle begins over again. Given this training, the next logical step for many new volunteers was becoming a project

steward or conducting a site visit, an annual requirement for any project receiving funds and a way for volunteers to see the impact of the organization firsthand.

Both Vikas Sangathan and Asai have a very robust system of onboarding new volunteers, including numerous training guides in an online note repository. Most of these instructions were detailed step-by-step guides to the paperwork and information necessary to release monies to the project partners. These documents included Foreign Contribution Regulation certification, a requirement from the Indian government for Indian-based non-profits to receive foreign funds, audit reports, and a very extensive process of checks at the chapter and central organizational levels to ensure all information is correctly entered and present. The Asai chapter and central officers provided explanations of what each of the documents are and their purpose to the process of distributing funds. Even though multiple chapters may fund a project, each project steward was responsible for ensuring the whole “package” was included with the request for funds disbursement.

Vikas Sangathan’s central governance body also managed these trainings. Once a quarter, there are conference calls that new volunteers can dial into to learn about the project cycle, with in-depth discussions of key documents and why they are necessary. The database that Vikas Sangathan uses provides for a more collaborative means to upload documents, with different chapters able to see what has already been submitted and what is pending from each of the chapters and meeting minutes of project discussions and follow-up actions at different funding chapters.

This process of project discernment is apparent in Asai and Vikas Sangathan, where volunteers are involved with the project proposal process from receiving a request for

funding, reviewing the request, analyzing and critiquing the proposal, and finally deciding on the status of the project in regard to funding it or not funding it. Research on giving circles has found that participation in the life cycle from fundraising to funding projects instills in members a greater sense of the context of the issues and needs in their community (Eikenberry 2006: 523). This sentiment was certainly echoed by participants in this research. Ashok, a volunteer with Asai who, at the time of this research, was also serving as the Chapter Coordinator, was particularly surprised by everything he became aware of through project discussions,

I learned a lot from [Asai]. During the first couple of meetings, I wondered to myself what have I been doing? I realized that there was more to what we were doing that just taking care of education but also becoming better citizens and do more.

One sentiment expressed by some participants was the desire to one day return to India and start their own non-profit organization. Participation in these organizations was a way to learn the ins and outs of non-profit work and models for working in social services. Vijay began volunteering with Asai in part because his wife's family has an NGO in India that works in education,

My wife and I are passionate about the cause of education, and we hope that we can do some good while being involved with Asai, and perhaps gain traction for the future to connect Asai to our organization back in India.

Many other respondents expressed a desire to go back to India and open a school or a community-based project. Arnab, a volunteer with Asai, expressed a desire to start a school back in the village he came from in India as well as in a slum that was next to his parents' home,

I've been influenced by my time with Asai and coming to the United States and earning...I understand the value of giving back. After I'm gone, I want at least one person to say 'he changed my life for the better.'

### *Turning Volunteers into Fundraisers*

One challenge for philanthropy in the Indian American community is the mistrust of charity and even the “un-Indian” nature of formalized philanthropy (Agarwala 2015a: 94). Therefore, one of the major functions of the organizations in this study, outside of their fiduciary responsibilities to their partners in India, is to offer education and engagement for the wider Indian community, not just vis-à-vis their work in India but also in the practice of philanthropy. A key part of the sociality of their experiences is communicating, educating, and providing general awareness (Dhesi 2010: 707). By working with the communities they fund, volunteers can communicate with the Indian American community about their experiences, including what they learn and observe during site visits and share stories from grassroots partners. There are a number of channels for this messaging, including fundraising events and peer-to-peer channels like personal fundraising pages or social media.

Personal networks are powerful in spurring people to give: if a friend is supporting a cause, and presumably has done the necessary homework to vet that organization, it provides a degree of legitimacy to that organization. Shikshan, Asai, and Vikas Sangathan have done a great deal of relationship building through an emotional appeal to home, but even more so, the personal networks of volunteers are invaluable. These volunteers serve as a bridge help provide a connection between the organization and the work that is being done, in an between the organization, the work that is being done, and the wider Indian community, in an era when donors and volunteers wish to be more hands-on and

experiential (Eikenberry 2007: 871). Peer to peer fundraising, where volunteers turn to their social networks to ask for funds, becomes a means by which donors and the community can also feel more connected to the cause in India. In Bornstein's (2012) research on humanitarian organizations in New Delhi, the use of personal connections was a strategy widely used by NGOs to resolve suspicions about where and how donated funds would be used. In these instances, social networks functioned as a guarantor, with people donating to organizations that they knew, or someone they knew was associated with it in some capacity. Giving was relational, based on the personal ties the donor had to the person asking for the funds, rather than a particular affinity to the organization's mission (Bornstein 2012: 63). Those affinities and bonds are amplified when donating is done by someone known to the individual. Fundraising essentially becomes "friend-raising" (Putnam 2000: 121). Because of the relative wealth of the Indian community, tapping into these networks is a key source of funds for these organizations. In addition to individual donations, many of these potential donors work for corporations that often match their employee's charitable contributions.

While many volunteers want to partake in project work and interface with partners in India, these organizations have to maximize the fundraising capabilities of volunteers. Many of the volunteers worked in IT or were well connected with others that did. These individuals are donors with a potentially high capacity to give. In fact, in the case of Shikshan, many of its earliest volunteers were entrepreneurs who are now among the wealthiest in the Indian community. A great deal of time and energy in these organizations is dedicated to fundraising in some capacity (Agarwala 2015a: 95). Often, this is a fraught issue for some volunteers, as they are not comfortable asking their social or work networks

for funds. To that end, these organizations try to make fundraising as painless as possible, by hosting public events, either concerts, dance events, or a paid lecture by a prominent figure traveling from India, as a way to raise funds. Instead of soliciting donor dollars, volunteers instead encourage their social contacts to attend an event they would have likely attended in any case. Increasingly, Asai, Shikshan, and Vikas Sangathan have taken advantage of the growth of corporate philanthropy, where corporations will often match employees' charitable contributions. Potential donors are encouraged to double their donation by contributing to the organization and having their employer match their contribution. This is another strategy by which the fundraising process is made easier. Volunteers are no longer asking their contacts to just donate but to activate a benefit they have as an employee.

Using social media, another tool to facilitate the fundraising process, Vikas Sangathan and Asai volunteers engage in campaigns to raise funds for the organization across the entire organization, not just for their chapter. Often, these fundraisers primarily take place through online social media campaigns. Campaigns include Asai's Work An Hour and Vikas Sangathan's One for India. To appeal to donors, these campaigns often contain language to quantify the impact of a donor's giving and may focus on a specific project or issue area. For example, one of Asai's campaigns encourages people to donate the equivalent of one hour of their salary. With Vikas Sangathan's campaign, their focus is on "making every one count," which seems to recall that the donor can make a difference, every dollar counts, and that every person served by the organization counts, worthy of dignity and respect.



For volunteers interested in fundraising, Vikas Sangathan held monthly Vikas Sangathan-wide calls, often on the weekend, to discuss fundraising ideas, such as hosting a touring standup comedy troupe at different Vikas Sangathan chapters or brainstorm ideas for fundraising. Chapter representatives would also share best practices. For example, one Vikas Sangathan chapter in the Northeast, to avoid competition and pool resources, merged their marathon-training program with the local Asai chapter (Vikas Sangathan Fundraising Call, February 17, 2017). To further spur volunteer interest in fundraising, Vikas Sangathan started a 10x Vikas Sangathan campaign. The campaign was framed as a way to envision, “what would be [Vikas Sangathan]’s impact if it was 10 times bigger?” While it was primarily a fundraising initiative, it also became a call for growing the organization, starting new chapters, and more volunteer engagement,

Partnering with some of the best groups in India, the volunteers of [Vikas Sangathan] have been making a significant difference. Let us work together to evolve a shared vision for scaling our effort (Vikas Sangathan Listserv Email, January 18, 2016).

Additionally, other programs, especially marathon-training programs, exist as a way for volunteers to fundraise in a way that follows a crowdfunding model. Rather than go to individual donors and solicit funds, a link can be shared on email or social media. As with any crowdfunding page, each page tells a personal story of why the individual is supporting that organization and information about the organization’s work in India, in the hopes that it not only attracts donations but also a greater awareness. These training programs helped expand the organizations’ reach and acquire new donors through the network of participating runners. A particular challenge for Asai and Vikas Sangathan was that the participants in the marathon-training program had never attended, nor were likely to

attend, a chapter meeting. To that end, coordinators for the marathon program were heavily involved in motivating the runners to fundraise for the organization. One such email, from Vikas Sangathan, included key steps for being successful in fundraising (emphasis is original author's),

Hello All,

We want to remind you all that the volunteers run the [Vikas Sangathan] program every year with so much dedication primarily to sustain the projects that are happening in India. We do expect that all of you respect the spirit of the program and make efforts to the commitments you have made for the program. Below are some tips for fundraising!

1. Believe in the cause!

Understand what [Vikas Sangathan] does and how it works. Come sit in at one of our weekly meetings as we discuss current projects and consider future ones. Ask us questions. Then, share your enthusiasm with others!

2. Engage

It's important to engage your potential donors *before* you ask them for a gift. Talk to your family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances...even your mailman!... about your participation in Run For India 2018.

- Tell them about what you're doing. A half marathon ain't no joke!
- Tell them that you are not required to raise money, but this issue is so important to you that you have decided you **must** raise money to help fund development projects in India.

3. Make the "Ask"

Don't ever be apologetic about asking for money! You're not asking people to help you with your rent! You are training for a half marathon. You are sacrificing time and sweat. You are making a huge commitment and you're going out of your comfort zone to help other people. Donors will recognize that commitment and effort.

- State your fundraising goal
- Suggest a donation amount
- Offer incentives!
- Get creative

4. Follow Up

Out of sight equals out of mind! Once you've sent an email to everyone, don't forget to follow up after a couple weeks. Your friends and family may have every intention of donating, but many of us tend to procrastinate. If you don't

follow up with them, they might assume you've reached your goal and don't need their support. Training and fundraising updates are a great way to keep people engaged.

- Your adventures become their adventures!
- You do the work and they share the glory.
- Provide gentle reminder of your commitment and let them know you still need their support.

#### 5. Say Thank you

A thank you goes a long way. After you are done, consider sending card or a photo of you completing your half marathon. Let them know how successful the event was, what you experienced and, again, thank them for their support.

Follow up emails, over the course of the training season, included special tips for fundraising in the office, reminding colleagues that their company may match donations, using social opportunities or special events, like a birthday, happy hour, or theme party, to have fun and fundraise, and other creative fundraising ideas such as hosting a bake sale or garage sale. Interspersed with these emails were communications about specific projects funded by Vikas Sangathan in India. Such emails were meant to instill confidence in runners and empower them to reach out to their networks for funds.

Shikshan differs greatly from Asai and Vikas Sangathan in that a professional staff handles many issues like documentation and financial tracking. Shweta, one of the early founders of Shikshan, stated that it was a conscious effort by the Board to professionalize some aspects of the organization,

While the organization is still largely voluntary, we decided it was necessary to hire a small staff. It has helped provide some professional structure and provide better services for our donors. Volunteers are only part-time and of course- they are volunteers- so they cannot be depended on all the time. A full-time staff helps make sure the organization is very transparent.

By professionalizing the key functions of non-profit governance and management, volunteers could focus more on fundraising and building coalitions around education. For

example, Shikshan held an annual technology and education forum that brought together education technology companies, like Khan Academy, and education-focused philanthropists. This forum served to raise Shikshan's profile but also became an event during which Shikshan could explore different technologies that could be used in their schools. During one forum, they discussed the possibility of having backpacks with solar-charging capabilities to provide power to a small lamp which could be used by students in areas with no electricity.

Shikshan volunteers focused on fundraising functions and doing the preparation work for major fundraising events. For example, during regional meetings, which would bring together two or three chapters of Shikshan, volunteers were trained on the tools they would need to talk to donors, especially major donors, classified as those that had donated the equivalent of ten schools, \$3,650 or more. Materials at these meetings touched on Shikshan's uniqueness compared to other Indian American organizations working on education issues in India. Their particular claim was that they reached schools in rural India that no other organization reached. Additionally, the idea that it costs a dollar a day to run each school was emphasized. These points were driven home as a talking point for volunteers to use when talking to donors or sponsors. Volunteers were more enthralled with the fact that such a model could easily be scaled, rather than questioning the quality of education at such a low cost.

Fundraising ideas were also given to volunteers, such as urging social acquaintances or major influencers in the Indian community to fundraise on behalf of Shikshan. These included in-home events or donating proceeds from an *Arangetram*, the stage debut of a student in Indian Classical dance. By being able to focus on raising funds, solicit

sponsorships, plan for events, or court large donors for significant gifts, Deepak, one of the officers of the Shikshan chapter, mentioned how this experience has helped volunteers to “build relationships with vendors, understand budgeting for an event, and be more organized overall.” Many of the members came from entrepreneurial backgrounds, having started their own companies, or had worked with startups. Their backgrounds in entrepreneurship, which often entailed soliciting funding for businesses, translated well into fundraising for Shikshan. Whether they were seeking out sponsorships for events, in-kind donations for fundraisers, or approaching major donors, many volunteers framed giving to Shikshan as an investment in a social venture.

### *Challenges Relying on Volunteers*

One of the pitfalls for all of these organizations is the overreliance on a group of volunteers who have been with the organization for a very long time. Suresh, a volunteer who had been with Asai for 8 years lamented that

You spend a lot of energy for a small group of new volunteers. You try to cater to the newbies, teaching them everything they need to do, and they become dependent. They do not learn to be self-sufficient or carry their own water. We need people who are dependable and [can learn] . . . how to do the work.

This deficit in knowledge and skill transfer was a concern at Asai’s national conference, especially in regard to the ability of chapters to successfully engage in democratic decision-making. Asai’s National President expressed,

Collective decision-making only works when there is collective ownership. Are we losing the latter and just sticking on to the former? Everyone’s voice matter[s] and should be heard. But that does not mean everyone’s opinions counts equally? Some are inherently more knowledgeable than the other and that should be respected. Do we act as individual owners of ideas that has to be collectively implemented? Instead we should collectively make decisions

which should be implemented collectively (Asai Conference Proceedings, August 31, 2013).

This of course represents one of the major contradictions in philanthropic voluntary organizations: trying to balance internal democracy and enhancing civic education and participation with the very real needs of the organization and its goals (Eikenberry 2007: 859). Within the other two organizations, this tension was not as prominent. Vikas Sangathan certainly struggled with volunteers not being informed about all aspects of the work, but a significant amount of time during chapter meetings was allocated for discussion on projects and their associated issues. In Shikshan, because most of the work revolved around fundraising rather than project-related work, the need to take a deep-dive into understanding the issues was not a key feature of chapter meetings.

Tensions between newer volunteers and older volunteers would especially come up in relation to contentious political issues or histories of project discussions. For example, one project, which funded the provision of auxiliary teachers in government schools, was highly supported by newer volunteers in the chapter. The program, to date, had dramatically improved students' scores on state board exams and overall academic performance. However, older volunteers, who were more familiar with the history of the project, had put in place a three-year plan to phase out funding over time for the project. Part of the rationale for cutting this project was that it enabled the government schools to skirt mandates that were required under the Right to Education (RTE) Act. The auxiliary teachers were merely reducing classroom sizes to a level that should be the standard in the schools per the RTE. Instead of supporting the project, the older volunteers argued, the school should really be fulfilling its mandate per the RTE and hire additional teachers.

Newer volunteers were more skeptical that the school would really hold to those standards if the teachers were withdrawn.

While the different organizations in this chapter had a number of core, dedicated volunteers, there was also a high rate of turnover among volunteers. Therefore, preserving institutional memory was a key concern. Technology has been a tool used extensively to address this issue. Past meeting notes, information about past events, and other pertinent chapter business are accessible to members through shared, cloud-based file storage. This enabled the building of an archive for the organization's work and provided an institutional memory. While older volunteers with the groups were a wealth of information on issues ranging from partnerships with other organizations to histories of different projects supported by the chapter, if they were unable to be present at a chapter discussion that contextual knowledge was lost. So, while there was a wealth of information stored in chapter repositories, the nuance of that information was lost without more veteran volunteers to fill in blanks.

To overcome these challenges, Asai started to allow volunteers to call into the meetings, as opposed to being physically present. There have also been proposals to create virtual chapters, where volunteers can have discussions and go through the project cycle through an online system and meet virtually. To address these administrative issues, in 2013, Vikas Sangathan hired a full-time staff member, a Development Coordinator, to facilitate some of the programs for Vikas Sangathan, as well as serve as a resource to different chapters and visit sites in India needing to be reviewed. This staff member fundraises for Vikas Sangathan and strategizes with different chapters on how to manage the chapter, attract new volunteers, and educate them about the different projects Vikas

Sangathan was supporting. In 2015, Vikas Sangathan hired a second full-time staff member because of the immense workload the Development Coordinator was handling. Shikshan continues to recruit new volunteers by tapping into other organizations that current volunteers are associated with, such as alumni groups for IITs or South Asian business and entrepreneur groups.

### *Learning the “Issues”*

A key part of the volunteering process is the transformation of perceptions, knowledge, and emotion (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008: 96). These voluntary organizations act as mini-publics, spaces intended for the use of deliberative democratic discourse. Through the course of these discussions the aim is to help members learn about social issues in India and create informed opinions that can result in informed action vis-à-vis the organizations being supported (Eikenberry 2007: 872). Specifically, Eikenberry studied giving circles, and in structure and function they are very similar to the organizations in this study. Giving circles, like the organizations in this study, are independent voluntary associations that involve individuals pooling resources to support organizations or individuals and include social, education, and engagement opportunities for members (Eikenberry 2009: 2).

As part of the on-boarding process, Vikas Sangathan places emphasis on educating volunteers about socio-economic issues in India. This was framed as an especially important task for volunteers, since, as it was explained by Shashank during a Vikas Sangathan meeting,

Vikas Sangathan as an organization raises funds and supports projects in India by partnering with them. On our end, we have a volunteer that will serve as the main contact with whom the organizations in India coordinate.



The aim is to partner with these organizations to help in community empowerment. For the partners, it is about the fund and getting the word out about the issues they are facing and what work we are supporting.

Volunteer meetings either start or end with discussions about current political events in India and the United States. Or – which happened quite regularly – during the course of a project presentation, discussions would veer into explanations of specific policies, like the Right to Information Act, or how a certain project is linked to an ongoing issue in India. For example, one partner, a health clinic in the state of Chhattisgarh, had been very wary of having volunteers come to do a site visit. The project coordinator had to explain that this was due to the suspicions the non-profit, which worked on *Adivasi* health and education, had of outsiders since it had been under intense government scrutiny. The organization was located in Central India, at the epicenter of a long, ongoing internal conflict with Naxalites, a Maoist group long in conflict with the Indian government, claiming to fight on behalf of India's indigenous population, the *Adivasis*.

Asai, on its website, has pointed to the ways that involvement with Asai “produced awareness about developmental issues in India” and “preparing a group of people who are more socially aware and socially responsible in their lives.” Involvement in these organizations has provided volunteers with a basic understanding of the tools for engagement in civic action in India. For example, in both Asai and Vikas Sangathan, volunteers have held education sessions on the Right to Information Act (RTI), a law passed in 2005 which allows for citizens to request publicly held information from the Indian government. Ajit had been involved with an RTI education project with Asai, and through this project,

I learned more about the RTI and how to apply for a request and get documents. Many people in the chapter, including myself, did not know how to file a request. The aim of the organization we were supporting was to educate students how to use the RTI- so it was a great learning experience for us as well.

Because many of its projects involve the RTI, Vikas Sangathan even sponsored a two-day webinar for volunteers to learn how to file an RTI request and ask questions to a project partner that provided a mobile RTI program that educated people in rural and remote areas on the RTI and assisted individuals or communities in filing requests.

Learning from other volunteers was another important aspect of socialization and awareness building within the organization. Ashok decided to volunteer with Asai because he was impressed with the volunteers themselves, and

Their sincerity towards the projects. I was also impressed that young people could make such important decisions, have heated debates, and still have respect for each other.... There are some very smart volunteers from whom I learn so much. They know about the real problems facing India and the importance of understanding the local context.

Many volunteers in Vikas Sangathan mentioned that discussions during chapter meetings were helpful for their learning. For example, discussions about caste changed many volunteers' minds, and made them aware of their caste privilege. Ravi felt that his involvement with Vikas Sangathan was key in shaping his views today,

I grew up in a conservative Hindu Brahmin family. Being in Vikas Sangathan opened my mind to different perspectives, especially around development and poverty. It heavily influenced my thinking. I don't think there was an ah-ha moment, but meeting P. Sainath<sup>13</sup> and hearing him talk would definitely be a moment because up until that time, I didn't know about farmers'

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<sup>13</sup> P. Sainath is a prominent Indian journalist who writes about social and economic inequality in rural India. His particular focus has been on farmer's suicide and the displacement of villages by large-scale development projects.

suicides. Either I had a lack of education on different issues or had only gotten a one-sided perspective.

Other Vikas Sangathan volunteers reported that their involvement with the chapter and participating in these activities allowed them to examine their own preconceived notions about social issues they were addressing through the projects their organization supported. Sri felt that his involvement in Vikas Sangathan had helped him grapple with the complexity of social issues:

For environment, my perspective changed. I can see now who will be the one who will be negatively impacted if something happens in the environment. I can see the connectivity more- if you change something in this one sphere, how does that impact things in another sphere. Politically also, what is the relationship between different governing bodies and how changes need to happen with local bodies and those interactions.

For Gautam, a second-generation Indian American volunteer with Shikshan, participating in these organizations was a learning experience of a different type. Often, Gautam's family trips to India entailed visits to family and religious sites. Becoming involved with Shikshan made him more aware of the issues facing rural India, as well as, "realizing there was a way to scale the type of model that [Shikshan] uses that is effective...it really shows that non-profits can make a big impact." Not only did his participation allow him to see a different part of India, but it also gave him a perspective that non-profits were able to do what the government in India could not do and be more flexible and responsive. This is a sentiment that has been echoed in the United States with non-profits being seen as more effective in service delivery as compared to the government. Since the 1960s, the non-profit sector has taken on an ever-growing range of functions, once the realm of government support. These were services that "Americans wanted but were reluctant to have government provide directly" (Salamon 2015: 4).

Being involved with these organizations often allowed volunteers to explore other interests or areas of involvement. For Sri, his involvement with Vikas Sangathan allowed him to learn more about environmental issues. Initially he joined Vikas Sangathan to be involved with education issues, but after joining the organization, he became drawn to projects dealing with environmental issues,

I would like to become a partner of Vikas Sangathan later on in life. I would like to go back in India and work in similar areas. I have met many people through Vikas Sangathan that will help me do that.... My primary goal is to go back and do social work.... I had never been a part of an NGO and working with Vikas Sangathan has helped me gain some of those skills. When you are coordinating a project, you come to understand the broader problem and issues. It will help you pick the problem you want to solve and how to tackle it. I could potentially move back and start an NGO and partner with Vikas Sangathan.

Engaging with different Indian non-profits through Vikas Sangathan's work has given Sri a network of organizations to work with, if he were to return to India. For Sri, like many others on H1B visas, the tentative nature of their status in the United States makes return to India a likelihood. However, in many cases, this promise of return does not often manifest.

The development of these networks is not dissimilar from previous research on philanthropic voluntary organizations. Members often become networked into the non-profit and philanthropic sector, to a degree often only enjoyed by major donors to organizations. This intimacy with the organizations often gives better insights into how they function, their needs, and challenges (Eikenberry 2006: 523). Furthermore, these discussions and debates lead to a deeper engagement around "civic virtue," and provide a framework for "rights and obligations and conceptions of justice and equality" (Henry and Mohan 2003: 616). Through the socialization process required to become a member of an

organization, volunteers came to have a deeper sense of belonging not just in terms of the relationships they built with other volunteers, but in terms of their relationship and work with India.

### *Communicating the Need to the Indian Community*

The next step after getting a grasp of the organization's work and how it framed social issues in India was transmitting that message to the wider Indian community. This also was a key part of the organization's fundraising strategies. These narratives become a key part of attracting donors in a field that is heavily saturated with other organizations competing for funds from diaspora donors, let alone other non-profit organizations that are also soliciting funds from donors. In a Vikas Sangathan -wide phone call, strategizing about how to grow Vikas Sangathan's presence and capacity, a volunteer with a chapter on the East Coast shared,

Why do we want 10x Vikas Sangathan? It is an inspiring vision about the change we are trying to make. What is the problem, and what are we trying to address? Currently, NRIs in the US are not sensitized enough to issues of social justice and poverty in India and we want to change that. Growing our capacity and reach becomes a vehicle for accomplishing that. We should want that in a strong way (Vikas Sangathan Conference Call, February 17, 2017).

Not only does this show an awareness of the role Vikas Sangathan and its volunteers play in educating the Indian community, but it also highlights a cynical view of the Indian community's receptiveness to social justice issues that Vikas Sangathan works to address.

The Development Coordinator, a paid Vikas Sangathan staff member, added,

We need broadening of our articulation of what Vikas Sangathan does. Engaging people in the process is an end in itself. We want 10x chapters in the US to support grassroots development in India, and also to spread progressive values in the community in the US. Vikas Sangathan is building a bridge to affect change at both ends. Organizing people can also be viewed as a function of Vikas Sangathan, not just supporting grassroots groups.

Beyond just educating the Indian community about the work that Vikas Sangathan does, the Development Coordinator envisioned Vikas Sangathan being part of realizing a fundamental shift in the values of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

Festivals, banquets, concerts, and many other public events provide a space for the Indian community to come together to learn, “shaping people’s understanding of the world” (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 146). And in the case of the organizations in this study, using cultural and community ties of homeland provides a draw for attendance and attention. Simultaneously, these events allow for cultural expressions and a call for civic action vis-à-vis the homeland. For these public-facing events, the organizations would usually make short videos highlighting a project in India they fund, an overview of the organization, and a video highlighting the specific chapter and joining as a volunteer. During a planning meeting at Jaya’s home, for a concert featuring a YouTube Indian fusion artist, Jaya’s husband was asked his thoughts on the videos, as he was not an active volunteer or particularly aware of Vikas Sangathan’s work. The volunteer organizing the concert were concerned how the video would speak to the audience, as they expected many attendees who had never heard of Vikas Sangathan. An excerpt of my field notes gives an overview of this video and Kaushik’s reaction,

*Kaushik, who has been in another room at this time, is called in by Jaya and she explains that the team would like his opinion on a video that is going to be shown at the fundraising concert in a couple of weeks. He agrees to give his honest opinion.*

*The video starts with the haunting flute music from the movie “Bombay” and infographics flash across the screen highlighting first the strengths India has, as the world’s largest democracy, as an economic powerhouse, and advancements in IT. The screen then flashes to a farmer manually dragging a plow through their own field and asks, “Why do people who feeds [sic] us go*

*hungry themselves?” The next screen shows a photo of manual laborers and has text, “Why are those who build our roads forced to walk 20 kms to find a doctor?” The film continues with a few more slides, showing children manual scavenging in a dump and asks similar questions. The next scene highlights newspaper headlines about corruption, farmer suicide, and natural disasters, all that disproportionately affect the poor in India.*

*The video then highlights interviews with project partners and those receiving services from those partners. In one, an Adivasi farmer in Madhya Pradesh is interviewed stating ‘If government recruits more doctors and teachers instead of police, the country would progress.’ A second interview features a woman who is a salt pan worker in the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. She says, “We are ready to educate our girls even staying hungry, but do you even know how we earn our livelihoods?”*

*The film then goes into an overview of Vikas Sangathan and its principles: campaigning against injustice, personal dedication, and working towards sustainable development. Video clips of interviews with project partners in the main areas of Vikas Sangathan’s work, agriculture, health, right to information, education, disaster relief, and campaigning for social justice, are featured. Perhaps to add legitimacy to Vikas Sangathan’s work, video clips featuring interviews with Vikas Sangathan partners from the show Satyamev Jayate are included. The show is hosted by the Hindi cinema actor Aamir Khan and focuses on different social issues in India.*

*The video concludes with statistics about the chapter, including the fact that the chapter has distributed over \$500,000 in the last 5 years, and encourages people to find out more or become volunteers. The video ends with a quote from Gandhi: ‘I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice.’*

*Kaushik expresses surprise because he did not realize that Vikas Sangathan was working in all of those focus areas. He had thought they just supported education programs. He also expresses that it’s “cool” that some of the project partners have appeared on Aamir Khan’s show. Prodded further by the volunteers in the room, he is asked if this would make him donate or become a volunteer. Kaushik pauses and says, “Well I will say that this made me more aware of what is going on in India, and I probably would donate because it [the video] made me think what am I doing here?” (Fieldnotes, Vikas Sangathan Concert Planning Meeting, May 3, 2015).*

Kaushik’s reaction to this video highlights one impression this messaging has on attendees at public events hosted by these organizations.

For their fundraising concert in 2016, Shikshan brought a group of alumni from Shikshan funded schools to perform at fundraisers hosted by various Shikshan chapters throughout the United States. The performance was touted as an opportunity to see art forms and dance from rural and tribal India. This is how it was described:

Building on its mission to bring rural Indian into mainstream culture [Shikshan] has trained its students in local music and dance to make sure that tribal and folk-art continue to flourish alongside Bollywood culture (Shikshan Concert Flyer, April 23, 2016).

During the event, however, most of the music performed was mainstream Bollywood music, patriotic songs, and “Indian” devotional music that were in fact Hindu devotionals. During the event, a video was shown that included a clip of Prime Minister Narendra Modi praising the performance of Shikshan’s “one teacher, one school” model. In the video, Modi labels Shikshan’s work as a “movement” that “brings education to poor children in the tribal belt and in remote jungles.” This language and the description used in the evening’s program evoke the notion of a civilizing mission which attempts to bring those served by Shikshan schools into the mainstream.

In addition to public events, the marathon-training programs allowed individuals to transmit the work of the organization to their social networks. It provided an individualized glimpse into what attracted that runner to support the organization and their interpretation of the work undertaken by their supported organization. With Asai’s runner and biker pages, there is a short video about Asai. This video starts with instrumental music and shows pictures of child laborers in both rural and urban settings. The music builds to show a black screen with one question, “do they deserve this?” The music then changes to the upbeat theme song of *Chak De India*, which includes lyrics such



as, “enough has been said, now is the time for action” (translated from Hindi). The video then intersperses pictures of children in different classroom settings with pictures of participants in the running and biking program, imploring potential donors, “let’s help them learn, read, and write. We run so they can read.” On Asai’s runner and biker fundraising pages, participants can add their own story to spur their contacts to donate. One Asai runner shared on her fundraising page,

Earlier this year, I had this urge to do something impossible. Or at least something I thought was impossible at the time - run a Half Marathon which is 13.1 miles or 21 kilometers long. I didn't think I could do it. Had never run before in my life. And here I am, feeling ready to run the first ever Half Marathon of my life.

A large part of the credit goes to Team [Asai]. I volunteered at an event held by [Asai] last year and was instantly struck by the devotion and energy the volunteers bring to this cause. The volunteers for this running group are outstanding. Their commitment and friendly words of encouragement is what has kept me going for the last 4 months of training starting from mile 1. In addition, I am constantly motivated knowing that the funds I raise could mean the difference between education and poverty for underprivileged children.

A participant in Asai’s biking program who is also a volunteer with the chapter shared on her page (text is original author’s, except where noted with square brackets),

You Ask ..Why I am passionate for raising money for [Asai]?

1. I see the impact first hand. I am a[n] [Asai] volunteer and a steward for the project Samerth Talim Kendra which is a daycare for special needs in a relatively impoverished locality in Ahmedabad. I see firsthand on how the funds are helping these special kids to lead a[n] independent life through everyday physio and speech therapies, special learning materials to develop motor, social and linguist skills and vocational training. Learn more about the project: Samerth Talim Kendra Project

2. Every penny/paisa [Indian coin of lowest value] of your donation goes for the cause. [Asai] is 100% volunteer driven organization with a very low overhead so that every dollar donated goes directly to benefit the cause.

Charity navigator which is an independent charity watchdog organization has rated [Asai] with 100/100 score Charity Navigator

3. We all are very fortunate to be in the place where we are today and to have choices in life. There are millions of children in India who do not have a choice but to work as child laborers. Most of them grow up without ever going to a school, not knowing what it would have been like to get an education. This is an effort to give them a choice to get educated, a choice to experience a better life and a chance to be a child again.

Understand your donation impact:

\$25 will provide education for 6 months for 1 child.

\$50 will provide 1 full year's education for 1 child.

\$100 will provide 1 full year's of education, uniforms, food and living expense at a residential school.

**REGARDLESS OF THE AMOUNT.. EVERY DOLLAR COUNTS!**

If you have read this far and feel what I am doing is meaningful, please contribute to my fundraising goal and help [Asai] in their cause. Your contribution will continue to impact the life of a child long after we move on with our own lives

Both of these examples highlight why these individuals are participating, whether it is a personal goal to run a marathon or a passion for the work of the organization. They also both heavily emphasize the impact on children. However, one challenge they also highlight is how volunteer fundraisers, who may not be as versed in organizational messaging, can spread misinformation. In the case of the bike fundraising page, this participant has included the claim that Asai is zero overhead, which as discussed earlier, was a claim that Asai could not technically make and had removed from their official documents.

Of course, there are limitations to the awareness raised by these organizations. It does not offer a complete picture of the socio-economic issues facing India today or of the different project sites. Obviously, a concert, film screening, friend's marathon-training fundraising page, or dance event cannot possibly cover such topics in detail, as primarily

these events are meant to be a forum for entertainment that happens to be a fundraiser. However, they are important to providing a brief glimpse into issues that some in the audience may only be vaguely aware of and perhaps provide that emotional draw to move that person to donate or become a volunteer.

### *Getting on the Same Page: National Conference and Chapter Business*

National conferences held by the respective organizations were a crucial way for members from around the United States to network with each other. They also served to ensure that messaging and agenda-setting across chapters were uniform. Often, these conferences were organized by the local chapters where the conference was being held, and the conference location rotated across different geographic regions of the United States. Proceedings covered a variety of topics related to chapter management, like fundraising and donor relations, to hosting invited speakers from projects in India to share information about their organization. Over time, as these organizations have grown, and some volunteers are unable to travel for the conference, the conferences have been webcasted or recorded to make the information available to all volunteers. The socialization of volunteers that took place at the chapter level was supplemented by socialization at the national conferences. For example, emphasizing the personal growth and development of volunteers through their work with the organization was touted as a tangible benefit that the organizations could offer at all three organizations' national conferences.

Many respondents shared that these national conferences helped reinvigorate them and recommit them to the work they are doing with the organization. For Gautam,

Shikshan's national conference was a great way to learn what other chapters are doing to raise funds, the future directions Shikshan was taking, and highlight its successes. For example, Gautam was impressed to see that an organization working in Afghanistan had adopted a similar model to start and fund schools. Ajay, who attended the conference with Gautam, came away

Very inspired by the conference. It is amazing to think this is a movement that started with one school and now has created thousands of schools, and it is a model now being replicated in other places like Afghanistan.... You feel that this has the power to change India.

For Ramya, with Vikas Sangathan, attending the conference helped highlight that her work as a volunteer and the work that the chapter undertook were all linked to "a larger Vikas Sangathan family."

The conferences served as an opportunity for the different chapters to raise questions, concerns, and suggestions. For Vikas Sangathan's most recent national conference, no one from the chapter in this study could attend in person, so chapter members collectively created a list of concerns to send to the conference organizers. These concerns covered topics such as the efficacy of large events in fundraising, volunteer burnout, and creating a 5-year strategic plan.

Along the same lines, the national conferences also provided a platform for volunteers to interact directly with non-profit leaders from India who were being supported by the organization. Volunteers gained greater insights into the struggles facing these organizations, and at the same time, these conferences provided non-profit partners a forum in which to discuss with volunteers how they can better work with their counterparts in India. Typically, the discussions revolved around the need for volunteers to

better understand the nuances and issues involved with the different projects and the need for multi-faceted approaches. The conference also served as a platform for project partners to air their grievances about the relationship between their NGO and the funding organizations. In particular, during one of their national conferences, one of Asai's partners was critical of the organization's extensive relationship with private schools, rather than seeking to support government schools. This partner was also critical of the organization's unwillingness to support projects that provided training for teachers, which eventually led to a change in Asai's funding policy.

### **A Space of Belonging**

The literature on immigrant organizations points to the space of belonging created by these organizations to allow for free expression and their ability to aid in the adaptation of immigrants, socially and culturally, to their new home. In Rudrappa's research on community organizations that specifically involve South Asian Americans, community is the space that "emerges through our social engagements over the processes of meeting others, negotiating differences, compromising and coming up with collective solutions" (2004: 6). Research on organizational socialization has found that surface-level similarities, such as similar backgrounds in terms of education, job field, or experiences, and deep-level similarities, holding the same values and interests, can lead to greater feelings of empathy and social support (Kammeyer-Mueller, Livingston, and Liao 2011: 233). As was seen in the third chapter, shared political orientations on development in India plays a major role in a volunteer's support for a specific organization as one basis for being involved, beyond affective reasons.

Coupled with the extensive socialization into the work of the organizations, the connections members form while being a part of an organization contributes to their retention in the organization. Dixon's research highlights the power of friendships and affect in organizations; Foucault's theorizations about desire extend beyond issues of control and highlight how people might organize through friendship and relationships that provide well-being, pleasure, and a sense of self-actualization. Friendship, for Foucault, represented the most provocative ties in human power relations (Dixon 2007: 290). Prachi, in reflecting on her first Asai meeting, highlights the draw of these relationships,

My first Asai meeting was when I was at Midwestern University. I was overworked with studies, underpaid research assistant, and completely homesick being away from my family and my partner, who was at another grad school. I had no idea why I was attending the meeting except some people I had met after I got to Midwestern invited me. Twelve years later I can say that each week I spent about 4 to 6 hours of time I don't have on various Asai activities.

One of the attractions of Asai meetings, for Ashok was that

Asai feels like a caring family. Usually we meet in someone's home and everyone is looking to have a good time while at the meeting. That really helps with the work we are doing in Asai.

These organizations also serve to expand individual's social networks. Nivi came to the United States through her job, as opposed to coming on an F-1 student visa, one common way that many Indian Americans first come to the United States. When she first came to the United States, she did not know very many people,

I only had very few friends when I first came to the area. Now that I am involved with Asai, I have a lot more friends. Over the past 4 to 5 months it really has increased drastically.

Noting that other members in the organization felt like family members or had become some of the closest friends that they had developed was not uncommon. In some cases,

romantic relationships developed between volunteers in the organization. Anand and Ramya, both volunteers with Vikas Sangathan, first met at a chapter in the East Coast and eventually married. During the initial year of this research, they had been living apart for two years. They always made it a point to meet at the Vikas Sangathan conference during the years they were apart.

For Srinivas, with Asai, the chance to come together as what he perceived to be a microcosm of India was a key part in his involvement,

I notice in every single chapter meeting, held every Wednesday evening, as I stare into the meeting room, sometimes filled with a lot of people and sometimes with only a handful, I notice volunteers coming from different walks of life, with different religious inclinations, with different political inclinations, and different philosophical inclinations. However, I speak for all of us when I say that in our heart of hearts, we are all convinced that education is the ultimate tool to empower a community, a country, and the whole of humanity.

Besides becoming a medium through which personal bonds were formed, the space the organizations provided for non-judgmental inquiry was also important. Shashank appreciated the space Vikas Sangathan provided for open forum discussion,

The community that is part of Vikas Sangathan helped me to realize different things that I had the wrong reasoning about. It was easy to say that I had been wrong and learn, and feel no shame about it.

Volunteers pointed to the draw to be part of a cause, with the added benefit that it supported India, “friendship for a cause.” Sheela was first drawn to Shikshan as a volunteer because

There was a very different community in this organization. Everyone was driven towards a cause, and I think that always brings together like-minded people. And [Shikshan] really brings together a diversity of people.

For many Shikshan volunteers, their involvement included their whole family, so it was more than just forging friendships but forging stronger bonds among family members through volunteering. In fact, all of the second-generation respondents in this study had “grown up in Shikshan,” volunteering alongside their family members at events or taking *van yatras* together during a family trip to India.

As part of an ongoing effort to recruit volunteers, Asai’s main website’s blog often features articles written by volunteers about their efforts to fundraise or site visits to India. Srinivas, a volunteer with the chapter in this study, shared,

I joined as a volunteer about a year ago and since then, not a single week has passed without some involvement with the organization. Through chapter meetings, fundraising events, site visits, stewarding projects, etc. my learning curve has been steep and satisfying. I have gained deeper understanding of the problems plaguing our country and higher respect for leaders working on solutions on the ground. It blows my mind that in its 25 years of existence, Asai has disbursed over 32 million to over 400 project partners in India, changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of underprivileged children forever.

Suresh, who is involved with the chapter and serves as an officer at the central governing body of Asai, is also involved with the marathon and biking training program that Asai runs. He had started to limit his involvement in the chapter and focus more on being involved with the training programs,

I feel like these programs are the glue that holds this organization together. Team Asai really operates very differently. You go running with a group and know that you are helping support a great cause. It’s a very binding experience. You run together, hang out together, and raise money together.

This is not to say there are not struggles with retaining or attracting new volunteers. A series of Asai meetings opened with lengthy discussions about enhancing the volunteer experience and keeping members engaged. Suggestions included introducing potluck



dinner to each of the meetings, more social gatherings with volunteers outside of Asai meetings and events, and better time management of meetings, which typically ran two to two and half hours long every Wednesday. These concerns about volunteer engagement were echoed by Vikas Sangathan and Shikshan numerous times, in the context of discussing the reliability of volunteers, the need for more volunteers to prevent burnout of the more dedicated volunteers, and strategies to recruit new volunteers.

### **Changing Relations with Home: Connecting to India**

A prevalent reason for involvement in these organizations was not necessarily to connect more with the Indian community in the United States but to give back to India and make a difference. For most respondents, outside of these organizations, their social circles and colleagues at work were predominately Indian. Therefore, their motivation to join was not necessarily to feel more connected to the Indian community. Additionally, many respondents were involved in other organizations that were oriented towards cultural programming, such as music or dance groups. Of course, in the process of being involved with these organizations, volunteers developed friendships.

In Rudrappa's (2004) study on Indian American organizations, one of her respondents reported such organizations can "contribute greatly to helping all immigrants maintain this balance of pride in being Indian and appreciating all that India offered, but also accepting wholeheartedly the privileges and responsibilities of American citizenship" (Rudrappa 2004: 107). In line with that, respondents shared that by being in the United States, they were better able to do service for India than if they were in India, where they might be tied down by family obligations and work and might not have the ability to earn

the way they do in the United States. Therefore, their ability to contribute back to organizations that were doing social service work, let alone even volunteer with an organization, was more significant in the US. During an education forum hosted by Shikshan, one attendee shared:

Most people feel guilt or [were] told they should feel guilt about being in the United States and not being in India. I do not feel that way at all. Because I am here in the United States earning dollars, I can do much more good for India than if I were back in India. I have more of a voice too (Shikshan Education Forum, August 12, 2014).

The process of migration, or exit, can also provide immigrants with a stronger “voice” in their home country, giving them the ability to engage in more direct expressions of dissent and other political speech (Fox 2009), to a greater degree than if they remained in their home country. For Indians coming to the United States, this is especially amplified because of the relatively privileged positions they come from in their home country and their economic power in the United States.

The shift from shame to “empowerment” has been part of the changing dialogue between the Indian government and its diaspora. There have been increasing efforts to capture the benefits of transnationalism and foster relationships with the diaspora, including them in state-led initiatives (Raghuram 2008: 320). Primarily, this has been by encouraging investment and bringing business to India. Promises of new investment opportunities, less bureaucracy, and a more favorable business climate have been extended to a certain echelon of the Indian diaspora (Varadarajan 2014: 54). Economic reforms in India have also contributed to a change in the relationship between the diaspora and the government. The state’s role was reduced and limited to providing only the required

institutional framework for a functioning market (Varadarajan 2010: 46). In this light, the third sector grew and became important to address services no longer provided by the state. Therefore, after a long drought of engagement with the diaspora, the promise of having a major economic impact on India by bringing in business has valorized the role of the diaspora in supporting India, and has created a shift in the diaspora's relationship to India. No longer is there shame in leaving home but, rather, a new dialogue about the ability to have an impact and make a difference in significant ways has emerged.

Therefore, involvement in these voluntary organizations was not seen so much as a way to feel connected to other Indians in the United States, but more to contribute back to a home, a place many respondents said, "gave them so much." Many of these volunteers could be seen as participating because it provides a form of "self-satisfaction" or "self-care" to be involved and give back and connect to India because of a moral and ethical sense of duty to do so (Silva 2010: 49). Saurabh, a volunteer with Vikas Sangathan, in fact felt that his relationship to India was mediated through his involvement with Vikas Sangathan, to the point that his trips to India centered on going to visit different project sites rather than visiting family.

Nivi became involved with Asai after volunteering with a number of other organizations, such as a local food bank and a tutoring program for children, through her workplace or in her free time. She was looking for more frequent volunteering opportunities that would allow her to make some impact in India; "I wanted to do something that was more than just monthly, and I wanted to see how I could contribute back to India and help kids there."

Sheela pointed out that being in Shikshan was very different than other Indian American organizations she had been involved with. The cause of the organization meant more to her than the potential it had to connect her with Indian culture while in the United States,

Being in this organization means making a difference in the lives of other people. This is different from other Indian American organizations that are more about pride in cultural heritage and bringing Indian culture here to an alien land.

Bhavana, with Asai, echoed a similar sentiment,

There is community based on passion for what we are doing. Volunteering with [Asai] is like a slice of India. Not one state, religion or community is represented. People are here because they like what they do here.

For many of the second-generation Indian Americans, involvement with these organizations was just one of many ways they were able to connect with their Indian heritage. Gautam had grown up studying Indian classical music, regularly attended religious functions at his local Hindu temple, and participated in a number of other cultural organizations. However, he felt that his participation in Shikshan, including doing a *van yatra*, allowed him to “learn about and see the real India.” As compared to cultural organizations, Gautam felt that volunteers participated because they were truly passionate about and interested in addressing the issues facing rural India.

### **Seeing the Project First Hand: Site Visits**

Site visits were often one of the ways that volunteers could physically connect the work they did in the chapters to the impact they were making in India. Many participants mentioned that the most rewarding part of their work with these organizations was to interface directly with the organizations, and in some cases, form close personal ties with

activists and employees with these organizations over the course of working with them and visiting them during trips to India. In fact, becoming a project coordinator was often the suggested way for members to engage with the organization and, as Ramya with Vikas Sangathan shared, “the best way to get involved and feel as if you are making a difference and giving back to India.” Site visits were also a means for the organization to show due diligence and bolster donor confidence that the monies being sent by the organizations to India were being used effectively. In a way, these visits were an informal audit of the partner organizations. While the site visits were enjoyable for the volunteers, they required a follow-up report and documentation. In some ways, these visits were also excursions to an India they were not previously aware of. One thing that is revealing about these site visits, as well, is how they reflect the different orientations that the organizations have taken in regard to development in India.

Shikshan does not necessarily utilize site visits as part of their vetting process to determine what schools to support, but the *van yatra*, or forest pilgrimages, are a powerful tool to engage donors and volunteers to visit schools supported by Shikshan. Nalini, a second generation Indian American volunteer with Shikshan, remarked that she was “blown away by the experience.” For Ajay, his *van yatra* trips while he was in high school cemented his continued participation in the organization, “I got to go on a *van yatra* one year into volunteering, and I think that really made a difference in me staying involved with Shikshan.” Almost all respondents who had taken the *van yatra* reported receiving a grand welcome with music, dance, and other festivities from the students and others in the village. No one remarked that these were highly staged events, created for their benefit.

The focus was more on the feelings such visits evoked for the volunteers. As such, the site

visit reports for these *van yatras* read like a travelogue. Sheela had visited one of Shikshan's school sites, and wrote

We were taken to the school. The school starts only at 3:00 pm since the children have chores to do at home and a day school is not viable. The school has no walls. Nearly thirty children of different ages sit on old jute bags. A very talented young lady from the village asks the students to begin with the chanting of the Gayatri Mantra and Saraswathi Vandana. The perfect pronunciation and the passion with which all the prayers were rendered were amazing. As the school progressed, we were allowed to ask questions. Whether it was math or language, the children eagerly put their hands up and answered correctly with a level of confidence I have rarely seen in Indian school children. As we are ready to leave, I asked a young girl as to what she wants to be when she grows up. "I do not know yet, but I will be someone" was the instantaneous confident response. I met another young girl who had graduated from a Shikshan school and moved on to a local middle school. "The training Shikshan gave me was excellent. I do very well in middle school." I noticed the importance placed on *sanskar*<sup>14</sup> and citizenship training. When I was in Delhi, I was shocked to see lack of knowledge amongst many youngsters about their own heritage, which led them to lack a sense of rooted-ness. The idea of good citizenship also was not emphasized. It would be wonderful to replicate the values inculcated in the youngsters in Shikshan schools at other places as well.

Her description, of course, highlights the quality of the education and the connectedness these students have to traditional Hindu practices, as compared to those in more urban areas like Delhi. As a volunteer, the importance of these schools for Sheela was not only about their provision of basic education but also their ability to instill Hindu cultural values.

For many volunteers, connecting directly with non-profit partners or making site visits was one of the most rewarding experiences of their time as volunteers. It also served to reaffirm their participation and helped them to understand more tangibly the impact the

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<sup>14</sup> *Sanskar* is a Sanskrit word referring to culture.

organization was having in India. Asai volunteer Sumit has stewarded one project in rural Rajasthan for 5 years. His relationship with the non-profit grew so close that every time he visits India, he visits the NGO and spends 2 to 3 days there. In his site visit report, because of his long relationship with the project, he could comment on changes that have been taking place in the local area,

The village is right off of [the national highway] and at the face of it seems well connected and would make one feel that it's a suburban area quite a bit different from remote village. The reality is a bit different though. The highway completion has brought access to highway road transport and more people are more freely traveling to the city for work, as well as it has given daily wage labor contractors an easy access to the villages. The village kirana (small scale grocery stores) bore the most significant change though. The inventory of processed, particularly packaged food has increased in the villages. I was able to see a variety of discarded plastic bags, chips, noodles etc. and plastic bottles much like what I'm used to seeing in the urban and suburban areas.

Walking deeper into the village makes one realize that the 'benefits' of the development have been mostly superficial. The interiors look no different from other villages that I've visited over the years. The [school] center runs in a rented two-room facility with no toilets or electricity. The village does have electricity lines, but metered connections are rare, and mostly limited to subsidized connections for water pumps used for irrigation purposes. There are 24 students in this school of mixed age groups and one instructor from a nearby village.

As compared to other site reports, Sumit's report casts a more critical look at what development as a concept means, especially in the context of a program supported by this chapter of Asai.

Ramya, the chapter President of Vikas Sangathan, had grown up watching her parents, who were both social workers, work in some of the very same communities Vikas Sangathan supports. Even she found, "I still get surprised when I go for site visits. You really see the day-to-day realities and it is a realization of a lot of the challenges we face."

Ramya felt that her site visit allowed her to understand the daily struggles facing the organizations supported by Vikas Sangathan and interact with the recipients of services from those organizations. Anand, another Vikas Sangathan volunteer, echoed this in his description of his first site visit,

The first time I went on a site visit that was the first time I did anything like that. I went to a site in Bangalore that is a resource group for women who were sex workers. The group works on a number of issues including the rights of sex workers. Going to the site was equally inspiring and hard, especially in learning about their efforts to combat organized oppression and striving to be afforded respect by the police.

Many of the site visit reports by Vikas Sangathan volunteers combined video storytelling with photography. Often, the site partners would be filmed describing the situation at their site, how Vikas Sangathan has helped them, and the ongoing need for support. These videos would later be used in promotional videos for the organization.

Not all site visits reflected such rosy pictures of the work the organizations were accomplishing in India. During one site visit to a school in Maharashtra, Aarathi, a volunteer with Asai, found that she had “mixed feelings” about what she saw at the site,

When I went for the site visit, I didn't know what to expect.... I could see the difference with how sincerely and with great dedication and commitment we try to raise funds and awareness among people for the cause, and then going back home I noticed that these are some teachers that get paid to teach these kids in the slums, and I didn't quite see that level of engagement from the teachers or at least that passion....This should actually inspire me that I'm doing a site visit, but this was different.

Aarathi's description is interesting, as well, because it reflects the level to which volunteers also invest themselves in fundraising efforts and stewardship of projects in India. Aarathi contrasts the chapter's work as volunteers, unpaid labor, with that of the teachers who are



paid and offers that as a source of her disappointment with the teaching quality at the school.

The site visits highlight a main challenge facing these organizations: truly being able to evaluate their impact on the projects they fund in India. Instead, ceremonial inspection takes place, whether it is a site visit done during a volunteer's visit to India or a *van yatra*, an orchestrated expedition to a far-flung village for the benefit of the traveler. These site visits are at the intersection of heritage tourism, a chance to see the "real India," and the spectacle of poverty tourism, witnessing and experiencing poverty, understanding that the location of these projects are "places of poverty" (Steinbrink 2012: 218). At the same time, these trips valorize the visitor for their generosity and the work of the organization of which they are a member. As a result, there is little empirical evidence outlining the real impacts of the funded projects, just anecdotal evidence. The challenge of deeper evaluation and introspection of programs is made much more difficult by the fact that all three of these organizations are largely voluntary organizations with volunteers who are not trained to evaluate these projects beyond a questionnaire they have been given and what they observe during their time visiting the project.

### **Conclusion:**

Through the process of socialization, volunteers develop a common sense of ownership of the organization and its work, which lends to the particular frame and agenda setting the organization engages in. There is selective attraction and socialization that shapes the individual's relation to the organization (Betz and Judkins 1975: 238).

Secondly, one key aspect of the organizational life of these groups is that they are not just

spaces of argument and debate about the key issues they work on, but also spaces of belonging, connection, and friendship. The ways in which immigrant voluntary organizations form and create meaning is important to understanding the politics, visions, and identities of the organizations themselves. Given the upheavals of immigration, the notion that involvement in these organizations can potentially provide self-actualization or friendship is a point worth noting. Members may be drawn to these organizations by various affective ties. While these ties are important to recruiting and retaining volunteers, another key goal that these organizations must accomplish is socializing their members to the values and functions of the group.

These organizations act as communities of practice whereby volunteers can acquire skill and knowledge that enables them to participate fully in the activities of the organization, typically through situated learning, or learning by doing. In conjunction with institutional theories of organizations, a focus on organizational culture highlights how internal processes of creating meaning through social interaction lead to stable patterns of behaviors, which then determine organizational structures and processes (Nebojsa 2015: 447). Members have to develop particular resources and vocabularies to form part of the institutional memory of the community (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 8).

One of the challenges facing these organizations in the future is ensuring that volunteers maintain their dedication to working on social issues in India. In an organization-wide coordination call, Vikas Sangathan volunteers indicated that there has been a drop off in volunteer engagement among immigrants, especially as their children get older and want to volunteer with or become involved with more local issues, such as non-profits providing social services in their communities in the United States. Additionally,

many of the children of the first generation maintain their ties to India through other cultural means, such as learning classical Indian dance or music or becoming involved with religious institutions. Previous research has found that overall second-generation Indians are interested in activism, just not necessarily linked to India. There is a fear of getting “trapped” in Indian issues through “artificial expectations and obligations, denying their more cosmopolitan upbringings and abilities” (Gandhi 2002: 360). Understanding these dynamics is important, as transnational migration is a multi-stepped, inter-generational process, infused with a complex, dynamic, multi-layered intersection of identities and histories (Henry and Mohan 2003: 614).

Volunteers felt connected to India through the work they were doing with their organizations, but their participation was not predicated on a need to establish connections with the Indian community in the United States. Most volunteers had a desire and felt obligation to support work in India because it was their homeland and because they had the means to give back. When an immigrant community is not well-established, cultural-specific institutions are important for forming a base for that community and a space of belonging. Research by Bhatt and Iyer (2013) found that respondents who immigrated to the Pacific Northwest in the 1940s and 1950s, when there were relatively few Indian immigrants, had to quickly build new institutions. However, newer immigrants had a wide range of organizations to choose from, including identity-based organizations, cultural societies, and organizations engaging in transnational philanthropy (174). As the one respondent observed in Brettell and Reed-Danahay’s research on Indian and Vietnamese American civic engagement, “now it is different for Indian children because the Indian community and the Muslim community are both bigger” (2012: 20). The growth of the

Indian community in this particular region provides other outlets for organizing, beyond maintaining cultural identity. As this research highlights, even among these three organizations, there is a diversity in the values, culture, and work of these organizations that provide a space for individuals based on more than just a shared Indian identity.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION: MANY DROPS MAKE AN OCEAN

And think back fifteen years....what did this landscape look like then? Nice and empty for miles on end. What story did those barren arid stretches tell you? That we were a poor country that looked and felt poor. Maybe we are still a poor country. But surely we are less poor today than we were fifteen years back. Our metropolitan cities and their suburbs, however, do not look the type of a third world country (Mookerjee 2007; quoted in Brosius 2010: 9).

What does development mean and what is the end goal? What does it mean to support development in India? These questions are at the heart of the work of the organizations in this study. In this final chapter, I reflect back on the questions raised in the introduction of this dissertation:

- How do the secular or religious dynamics at play in India and the diaspora shape ideologies of development espoused by these organizations? How does this reflect the politics at home and abroad?
- How do individuals in these organizations understand their work in the organization and its relation to development and social issues in the homeland?
- Given the unique character of these organizations, as compared to other ethnic organizations, what is the particular space for belonging that is created in these organizations? And how are members socialized to the functions of a non-profit organization?

Chapter Three highlighted how the organizations in this study reflect the religions and political dynamics at home in India, and how these dynamics shape the way they define development. These organizations offer a platform for political expressions framing development and the intersection of Indian socio-economics with that vision. Shikshan represents the Hindu Right's conceptualizations of development based on growth economics. In this light, philanthropy for development is an investment and those on the receiving ends are social entrepreneurs. Asai represents the middle way. It is a perspective

that sees development as a social good, devoid of politics, and does not question that it may have uneven effects for marginalized communities. At the same time, this is a perspective that maintains the status quo, and often times, is merely a band-aid on a gaping wound. Lastly, Vikas Sangathan highlights a more left-leaning conceptualization of development and questions liberal or conservative conceptualizations of development. They attempt to address the systematic problems surrounding marginalized communities in India and find alternative forms of development.

Chapter Four highlights the salience of education funding by diaspora organizations. Education is a central issue for all three organizations, one of the most striking similarities between the three organizations. All three organizations also support education projects that impact some of the most marginalized communities in India, Dalits and *Adivasis*. Most volunteers did not seem to consider the power dynamics at play between the populations their funding impacted to their privileged position in the United States. Instead, education was given a primary focus because of the role education played in the ability of participants to immigrate to the United States. Or, in the case of a few of the participants, their own struggles or witnessing the struggles of others to obtain an education made them see education as a transformative force. Education, particularly for Shikshan and Asai, is the input that will push the needle on development in India. But, in the case of Shikshan, it is part of an ideological struggle to gain electoral support for the BJP with populations that have traditionally been excluded from Hindu Right visions of India. Vikas Sangathan, to an extent as well, highlights the necessity for educational inputs for development, though that connection is more nuanced, with support for education also including rights-based education. These may be myopic views of the power of education. Education alone cannot

compensate for other social realities in India. There still exist many social and economic barriers, especially in a context like India where religion, caste, and gender can outweigh benefits conferred by education. This chapter also highlights the growing role of the diaspora in service delivery, in the wake of the retreat by the state.

Finally, Chapter Five highlights how these organizations are spaces of learning and communities of practices. Through various levels of socialization, volunteers learn about the functions of a non-profit organization, especially in regard to governance and fundraising. Not only do they learn about these functions, but they also put them into practice, either by stewarding a project, coordinating marathon-training programs, or organizing fundraising events. It is through this socialization that they come to see themselves as contributing members of the organization. Volunteers also learn about the issues associated with the projects they are supporting. Whether it is a better understanding of education policy in India, caste discrimination, or the environmental impacts of hydroelectric dams, through the filter of their organizations work, volunteers gain insights into these topics. Key to the survival of these organizations, volunteers must then communicate to the wider Indian American community about the work of these organizations, seeking funds to support their mission, and provide a perspective into how these organizations define development. Deeper engagement with these organizations occurs through the ability to engage further with project partners through site visits. For many volunteers, their involvement fulfills a desire to give back to India and play a role in addressing issues there. There all contribute to feelings of belonging and continued involvement in these organizations.

## Contributions

Over the past 20 years, the number of organizations in the Indian community engaged in diaspora philanthropy has grown exponentially. The diaspora has taken a much larger role in addressing development-related issues in India. This dissertation expands understanding of the complexities and politics of the Indian diaspora in the United States by analyzing three Indian American organizations engaged in transnational philanthropy. In proportion to the remittances sent through families, collective remittances or philanthropy through immigrant organizations are much smaller, but they are on the rise. And as they grow more prominent, it is important to understand how these funds can be directed to highly needed and effective forms of development.

Each of the organizations in this study is just a small part of the overall giving towards development-related issues in India that comes from the Indian American community. But their growth in the past 20 years highlights the growing role of diasporas in addressing development issues in their home countries, at a time when the state continues to draw back from the provision of social services. Collectively, the financial contributions from these organizations are in the millions. So while each individual chapter or local group may not have a major impact beyond the projects they fund, the overall impact coming from the Indian American community is significant. Private philanthropy from abroad to Indian NGOs in 1990 measured Rs. 9,454.7 million, more than \$135 million (Sundar 2010: 7). Donations from private philanthropic sources, including donor agencies, predominately came from the United States (Sundar 2010: 97). In 2012, these funds rose to Rs. 115,469.2 million, or roughly \$1.65 billion (Ministry of Home Affairs 2012).



Building upon the notion of brain circulation, the Indian diaspora is a unique group that has benefitted from their position of privilege in India, which allowed them to immigrate to the United States and become economically successful. Through that success, they could have a bigger economic and social impact on India. This is part of a larger cycle by which the Indian government made investments in these individuals, building and investing in premier institutes of higher education, that allowed these elite individuals to gain the skills and knowledge they would need to immigrate and be successful. Once they achieved success in the United States, then, it would be hoped, they would channel financial, human, and organizational capital back to benefit the homeland's development (Hewitt 2007: 25). The work done by the organizations in this study are part of this cycle, helping to forge a closer bond between individuals and their home country. The notion of brain circulation, here, helps highlight the ways that migrants can still have an impact on their country of origin through transnational collaborations. This study extends the literature of brain circulation in the area of for-profit entrepreneurship to look at it in the context of transnational philanthropy.

It is precisely because of the growing wealth of the diaspora that countries like India are increasingly turning to their diasporas to intervene on development-related issues. Philanthropic organizations, as one such vehicle to address development issues, become one way in which migrants feel they can effect change in their home countries from abroad. As seen in this research, these organizations are taking on a significant role in funding projects that otherwise would be basic government provisions, like schools. But there are limits to the work the diaspora can accomplish.

Despite the influx of funds in the past decade from the Indian diaspora, the inadequate distribution of resources and fragmented, short-term focus hinders the ability of diasporic organizations to truly address a community's needs and contribute to "solving the problem" (Eikenberry 2009:8). There are difficulties in enacting change for deep-seated social problems. In fact, as this research highlights, ideological leanings influence the projects that each of these organizations support, which makes it even more unlikely these organizations are seeking to change the status quo. In the case of Shikshan, the schools they support are part of a larger electoral strategy by the Hindu Right to garner more support; for Asai, supporting schools is a "social good," and is devoid of politics. Those projects that do engage in political activism are quickly cut off from funding. Vikas Sangathan's support for more progressive grassroots organizations does set them apart, but again, there are limits to the how much their funding for these organizations can change the overall status quo.

For individuals in these organizations, participation provides informal education opportunities on non-profit governance and social issues in India. These organizations are spaces to experiment, make mistakes, and learn, with very few negative consequences, a rare opportunity. Various levels of socialization provide training on how to be a volunteer, how a non-profit organization functions, and a better understanding of social issues in India. These organizations, in many respects, are similar to the groups studied by Eikenberry in her research on Giving Circles. However, what sets these organizations apart is their need to negotiate relationships transnationally, and the ways that politics of home and the diaspora play into their work. Additionally, as immigrant organizations, they are also spaces for belonging and comradeships around shared ideas of development and

articulating their vision for India's future. Most research on immigrant community organizations has focused on the ways that these organizations create a space for cultural expression within the host country. As this research shows, the role of immigrant organizations, as the community becomes more diverse, becomes more nuanced. Particularly in the geographic location for this research, the Indian community is large and well-developed. Belonging is not just about a shared ethnic identity, but it is also about shared ideas and visions.

This begs a larger question about immigrant organizations: is there a threshold at which immigrant organizations are no longer the sole spaces for belonging, but rather, become an extension of a well-established community and not the foundation of that community? Volunteers in these organizations felt that their involvement with their chosen organization filled a niche interest that was in line with their values and politics. Because of affinity towards the organization's particular political and religious orientation, these organizations provide not just a space of belonging but also ideological realization. Shared ideas about development and the connection to India create a bond between volunteers. The work of the organizations provides an articulation of an India that volunteers would like to see, whether it is a more secular nation, a nation that is inclusive of minorities, or a nation that is defined by majoritarian religious sentiments.

On another level, the philanthropic organizations in this study also provide a direct connection between volunteers and the larger Indian community in the United States with organizations in India. Because of their ties with these organizations in India, Shikshan, Asai, and Vikas Sangathan have the ability to serve as a link between the Indian American community and the communities being served in India. They have far more visibility and

engagement within the communities in the host country than much larger philanthropic or private foundations. Because of this close interface, these organizations serve to educate the community about social issues in India, albeit through the filter of the organization's work. Volunteers' roles in peer-to-peer education, whereby volunteers impart their learnings and experiences to their peers, are an unstated but important feature of all the organizations in this study, as both an education tool, but more importantly to the survival of these organizations, as a fundraising channel. This peer-to-peer exchange is the means by which certain discourses about development gain traction within the diaspora. These discourses have wider implications for the relationship between India and its diaspora, particularly, as has been seen, the power of the diaspora's purse can significantly shift the political dynamics within India.

### **Future Areas of Research**

There are certainly many questions that still need to be addressed when looking at transnational philanthropy within the Indian American community. What follows is a discussion of some of these future avenues of inquiry

#### *The Impact of Funding on NGOs in India*

This research solely looked at volunteers based in the United States and the functioning of the organizations in that context. One area of future inquiry would be to study the impact receiving funding from the diaspora has on social service organizations in India. The growth and proliferation of NGOs in India has in part been aided by the increase in external funding available to them (Sundar 2010: 1). The evolution of a foreign funding policy has run parallel with the development of NGOs in India, with globalization and

liberalization being two key forces in these changes (Sundar 2010: 2). What are the additional challenges NGOs in India face? Are there dependencies that form because of this funding? How do these sources of funding differ from local sources of philanthropy? What are some other unique challenges that are presented?

An example of what these issues might be came up at an Asai meeting I attended, and a project partner presented at a chapter meeting. In the discussion about their work, they had mentioned that local law enforcement in India had stepped up their scrutiny of the organization because they received foreign funding. Some of this scrutiny also included pressuring the organization to pay bribes. This scenario highlights a unique challenge for organizations receiving funding from abroad. Beyond even local law enforcement and politics, at the national level, there has been a greater scrutiny of organizations that are based abroad, like Greenpeace, or receive funding from abroad, such as the organizations supported by the diaspora in this study. This new atmosphere of suspicion presents a challenge to NGOs.

#### *Changes to the Philanthropic Culture in India*

Many of the early founders of Asai and Vikas Sangathan returned to India and became involved in social services, whether it was through non-profit organizations or the social service wing of a political party. Furthermore, the desire to return was expressed by a few volunteers in this study. There is growing scholarly interest in the return of immigrants to their home country. Philanthropy in India has evolved over the past 30 years due to changes in India's economy, the growth of the middle class, and an influx of Western-based companies that encourage corporate social responsibility. Therefore, it

would an interesting area of exploration to understand how these returnees are influencing cultures of philanthropy and social service.

### *Geographic Differences in Indian American Organizations*

The region where this research was carried out, the West Coast, is distinctive, culturally and economically, from other areas of the United States. In this research, in the fourth chapter, a couple of volunteers shared their experiences with different chapters in different geographic regions and how they differed from the chapters in this research. Understanding how regional politics and culture in the United States shapes the Indian community in that area, and how this impacts the politics and nature of Indian American organizations would be an interesting direction forward from the research presented here. Does the relationship with the wider community play a part? Does the size and history of the Indian community shape some of the latent features of these organizations? Especially with the increasing polarization of the United States and the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric espoused by the Trump administration, do the latent functions of Indian American organizations differ by region?

### **Concluding Thoughts**

There are a number of reasons why participants join these organizations, but equally important is the reason why people stayed engaged in the organizations. Many cite joining the organizations because of people they knew, or they felt a connection with the organization and its cause or wanting to give back to India. For some, they eventually want to go back to India to start their own NGOs or work with existing NGOs in India. In almost all the interviews, there was an “ah ha!” moment associated with some aspect of being

involved with the organizations in this research. For some, they felt it after joining the organization. For others, their “ah ha” moment happened when they first started stewarding a project, and for others still, when they did their first site visit. For volunteers who had not had a chance to steward a project or conduct a site visit, their “ah ha” moment came from their growing awareness of different social issues in India. Many stayed in the organization because of similar outlooks they shared with others in the organization, or they developed relationships with partners on the ground in India. Members in the organization came to form their social circle, as well.

However, the other side of becoming a member is staying in the organization, a challenge with which all three organizations grappled. One of the major challenges shared by all three organizations was how to ensure accountability of volunteers. Often, a core set of volunteers were the first to volunteer for events or projects, and even if others did volunteer, they often did not follow through, and again, the work fell to core volunteers. Additionally, the organizations struggled with the turnover of volunteers and the exit of volunteers from the organization. This created difficulties in establishing an institutional memory and prevented learning from the past. This impacted the ability to introduce new projects or impacted relationships with current partners because the chapter continually had the same conversations year in and year out. With that said, there were also a number of respondents who mentioned that one of the benefits of these organizations is that you can easily deactivate and activate again when you are ready to re-join the organization. This happened in the case of some interviewees, who deactivated for numerous reasons, such as the birth of a child, marriage, change in jobs, or needing to commit time to other areas of their lives.

In the end, the scale of development work is not what is important, when discussing diaspora development, but the distinctiveness of the work, as it creates opportunities for innovation. Pride, on the part of volunteers, and the commitment to place produces social relationships between those in the village and elites from the outside. New policies and initiatives by home governments have led to increasing opportunities for organizations like Asai, Shikshan, and Vikas Sangathan to play a role in relations between communities at home and the diaspora, providing the financial resources for development.

These diaspora organizations provide an opportunity for individuals to valorize their efforts to contribute to their home country. This is perhaps best illustrated in a *New York Times* article about Om Dutta Sharma, a taxi driver in New York City. Over 20 years, Sharma contributed a portion of his salary to support a school in his hometown. He described his contributions to home, saying, “it is my moral duty to take back some wealth, by drop, drop, drop” (Dugger 2000). And this, perhaps more than anything, is the driving force behind organizations like Shikshan, Asai, and Vikas Sangathan.



## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There were many participants that made this research possible. I have included their background information here and organized them by their organizational affiliation. Participants in this research have been given aliases. Names appear in alphabetical order.

### **Shikshan**

#### *Ajay*

Ajay, in his own words, is “not the typical Indian American.” He was born in Hong Kong and at the age of 10, moved to the United States and lived in the South. When he was in high school, a chapter of Shikshan started in his community, and he became involved with this family. His participation dropped off when he attended college, but after college, he moved to the West Coast. When he moved to the area of this research, he was employed with a university and started his involvement with Shikshan again.

#### *Deepak*

Deepak was born and raised in the UK. He came to the United States in the mid-1990s to work as a Chemical Engineer. He moved into industries focusing on smart grid technologies and energy efficiency. Eventually, he started his own company, which he runs today. His first involvement with the Indian community in the United States was through a networking organization for Indian entrepreneurs, where he served as a mentor. He first heard about Shikshan through a radio program on the local Indian-American station. Shweta, another participant in this research, was being interviewed. After hearing her interview, Deepak reached out to Pranav, who was the President of the chapter at that time, and began attending meetings. At the time of this research, Deepak was serving as the Chapter President.

#### *Gautam*

Gautam is a second-generation Indian American, who was born and raised on the East Coast. He moved to the area of this research in 2013. He had been involved with Shikshan from a very young age with his family. At the time of this research, he was employed by a tech startup company.

#### *Hemant*

Hemant arrived in the United States prior to the 1965 changes to immigration policy. He arrived in 1958 to enroll in a PhD program at a university in the upper Midwest. Upon completion of his degree, he moved to the area of this research in the late 1960s. By his own description, Hemant was a “total techie” and had been at the forefront of the first innovations in semiconductor and chip technology. Hemant later became involved in an organization that provided mentoring and networking opportunities for Indian entrepreneurs. This organization, a local Jain temple, and Shikshan were Hemant’s three

areas of involvement in the Indian community. He became involved with Shikshan in 1997 and currently serves on the national board of the organization.

### *Nalini*

Nalini grew up near where this study took place. She and her family had been involved with Shikshan at a different chapter, and she became involved with the chapter in this study when she began attending a local university, she connected with this chapter to continue her involvement.

### *Pranav*

When I first reached out to Shikshan, Pranav was the President of the Chapter. Shortly after this research began, Deepak became the President. Pranav came to the United States just a little over 30 years ago, and came through an H1B work visa. Pranav became involved with Shikshan in 2003 when he attended a lecture being given by an Indian journalist and Shikshan had a booth at the event.

### *Radha*

Radha was in her 70s. She migrated to Canada in the late 1960s when she got married. She and her husband later moved to the United States in the early 1970s, when her husband became a post-doctoral research. Radha had been very active in a number of Indian community organizations, including a caste-based organization for Brahmins in North America, a regional association for migrants from the state of Uttar Pradesh, and another organization that raised funds for a hospital for the blind in India. At the time of this research, she had been involved with Shikshan for 5 years. She found out about Shikshan by attending an event at the local Indian community center. She was further attracted to the organization because it did a lot of work in the region of Indian that her late husband was from. She was involved with the Overseas Friends of the BJP in 2014 to support efforts to elect Narendra Modi as Prime Minister.

### *Rupali*

Rupali was retired from the finance industry. She became involved with Shikshan through an Indian entrepreneur networking organization, of which she was a member. She came to the United States in the late 1970s through marriage. At the time of this research, she had been volunteering with Shikshan for 1 year.

### *Sheela*

Sheela arrived in the United States in the early 1980s. She had studied at an IIT and wanted to come to the United States for her Masters. She studied Computer Science and moved to the region where this research took place upon graduation, working in educational technology. Sheela was initially involved in the Indian community through traditional dance, both Bharatanatyam and Kathak. It is also through dance that she first started fundraising for different social causes. In 2008, friends that she knew were involved with

Shikshan, and they wanted to host a fundraiser. She continued her involvement with Shikshan from that time, and in 2013, she began formally working for the organization.

### *Shweta*

Shweta left India in the 1970s, first moving to England after she got married. She worked as a law clerk in the UK. After a few years in the UK, her husband wanted to move to the US but could not find a job there, so they moved to Canada. In Canada, she had to go back to school, since her degrees from India were not recognized there. Upon graduation, she worked with the local city government as a city planner. Eventually, her husband obtained employment in the United States, and they moved in the late 1970s. When they moved to the US, Shweta became involved in business development for a computer memory company. The company grew internationally, and Shweta was recognized as one of a handful of women in the tech industry at the time. Over time, she started four different companies and was a charter member in a mentorship organization for Indian entrepreneurs. In 1999, she met with an industrialist that was visiting from India who was involved with Shikshan's activities in India. Through this meeting, Shweta became one of the earliest members of Shikshan and helped create the 501(c)3 designation for the organization in the United States.

### **Vikas Sangathan**

#### *Anand*

Anand came to the United States in 2003 to complete a PhD in Biology. He later moved to a major East Coast university to do his post doctorate research. At that university, he became involved with the Vikas Sangathan chapter to meet new people. In that chapter, he met his wife Ramya. Ramya moved to the area where this research took place in 2009, and Vikas Sangathan served as a link for them during their time apart. He moved to the West Coast in late 2013.

#### *Jaya*

Jaya came to the United States in 2010 after she married her husband. She became involved with Vikas Sangathan while she was studying for her Master's at a local university in 2012. Jaya was actually the first person I met with Vikas Sangathan. She was running an informational booth at an Indian-community event. Her involvement with the chapter has been intermittent, given her familial and academic obligations.

#### *Lata*

Lata first came to study at a Midwestern university and later studied at a university on the West Coast in the early 1990s. Prior to her involvement in Vikas Sangathan, she had been involved in a number of progressive organizations in the Indian community and community-based organizing. While she has limited her involvement to stewarding a couple of projects supported by the chapter, she serves as a bridge between South Asian progressive organizations in the community and Vikas Sangathan.

### *Pankaj*

Pankaj studied at a university in the United States in 2008, and upon graduation, he gained employment with a major technology firm. When he started working, he was interested in connecting with an organization that worked on development issues in India. Through a personal connection, he reached out to Shashank, who was the President of the chapter at that time. At the time of this research, he had been involved with the chapter for 4 years.

### *Ramya*

Ramya arrived in the United States to study at a university in the western part of the United States for her Master's and moved to the East Coast for her PhD and post doctorate work. She knew about Vikas Sangathan's work in India, since her parents were social workers for an organization that received funding from Vikas Sangathan. Initially, when she was studying for her PhD, she joined the Asai chapter there, and then joined the Vikas Sangathan chapter at the university where she did her post doctorate work. It was at this chapter that she met her husband, Anand. Ramya moved to the area where this research took place in 2011 and immediately connected with the local Vikas Sangathan chapter. She had met many of the members at national conferences. In 2015, she became the Chapter President.

### *Ravi*

Ravi was born and raised in Mumbai and had moved to Bangalore for work. Through his work, he migrated to the United States. He had come to the United States a few times on short-term projects, and eventually, was given a full-time position in the US. He first lived in the southeastern United States and then moved to the northeast. There, he became involved with Vikas Sangathan and continued his involvement when he moved to the West Coast in 2010. At the time of this research, Ravi was still involved with the chapter, but he was starting to draw down his participation to be more involved in social justice organizations focused on race and immigration issues in the United States.

### *Santosh*

Santosh is one of the early founders of Vikas Sangathan. He studied at a university on the East Coast, where founded Vikas Sangathan in 1991. One of the founding stories about Vikas Sangathan is that the storyline of the Hindi movie *Swades* is based off of work that Santosh did in India. He is considered to be a Fellow for Vikas Sangathan, among a number of other volunteers who have quit their jobs to work on social causes in India. According to Vikas Sangathan's website, they "play a leadership role in connecting Vikas Sangathan with some of the most grassroots movements in India, and have helped conceive and implement projects, programs and campaigns that have made a big impact. Their work, together with that of the volunteers has helped sustain and scale Vikas Sangathan."

### *Saurabh*

In 2010, Saurabh came to the western United States to study for his Masters. He joined the chapter of Vikas Sangathan at his university. When he graduated in 2012, he had a job offer and moved the area where this research took place. Once he moved, he connected with the chapter of Vikas Sangathan in this study.

### *Shashank*

In 2004, Shashank came to the southern United States for his PhD in Computer Science. There was a Vikas Sangathan chapter at his school, which he learned about from a cultural event hosted by the Indian Student Association. Shashank started his involvement with Vikas Sangathan in 2005. At some point, he quit his PhD and thought about returning to India to start a school. When Shashank finished his masters and quit his PhD, he instead moved for work and took a hiatus from his volunteering with Vikas Sangathan. In 2009, he joined this chapter of Vikas Sangathan. He served as the Chapter President from 2013-2015.

### *Sri*

Sri is another volunteer who migrated to the United States through his work. From 2006 to 2009 he came to the United States multiple times for short-term work projects. In 2012, he was offered a full-time position and settled in the United States. Sri was interested in being involved in some philanthropic organization focused on the social sector, so he chose a few organizations to research and decide where to volunteer. He settled on Vikas Sangathan because, as he says, "The group was good. The first meeting had 12 people in it, warm atmosphere, everyone was about the same age as me, and I could connect." Sri's wife was also involved with the chapter.

### **Asai**

### *Aarthi*

Aarthi arrived in the United States in the early 2000s for her Master's at a midwestern University. She graduated and worked for a large tech firm. She first became involved with Asai in 2006 through the marathon training program because one of her coworkers was a coordinator for the program. Aarthi has been splitting the focus of her volunteering between the chapter and acting as a coordinator for its marathon training program.

### *Ajit*

Ajit came from Hyderabad to study in the United States in 2005. He graduated with his Masters in 2007 and began working as a contractor in the IT field. He had tried to volunteer at first with Big Brother/Big Sisters, but around the time he was starting to volunteer, he moved for work. He heard about Asai's marathon-training program and first became involved as a fundraiser through that program. He began attending chapter meetings in 2013.

### *Arnab*

Arnab was a newer volunteer to the Asai chapter, at the time of this research. He was brought up in the state of Uttarakhand and attended government schools there. His father worked for the government. Arnab attended engineering college in India. In college, he often volunteered as a tutor. He came to the United States through a work visa in 2010. During this time, he was not active in any volunteering. In 2012, he was laid off from his job at a tech company, and questioned what he had done in the past 15 years. It was during this time that he looked into volunteering with an organization in the Indian community. He came across Asai because they had flyers at several Indian grocery stores and restaurants in the area.

### *Ashok*

Ashok came to the United States a few times because of work before permanently settling in the United States in 1999. He lived in many other parts of the United States before settling in the region where this research took place. Ashok joined Asai in 2007. He was interested in getting involved in some education philanthropic organization. Through an internet search he found Asai and wanted to check out a meeting because “they had a catchy name.” Ashok attended meetings of multiple organizations, but he especially liked the “caliber of the volunteers” at the Asai meetings. At the time of this research, he was the Chapter Coordinator.

### *Bhavana*

Bhavana came to the United States in 2001 when she got married. She joined Asai in 2005 after hearing about their programs for children at a public forum event. She attended meetings and started training in their marathon program. She continued to be involved in Asai’s program called Support a Child, which enables individual donors to support the education costs of one child for one year. For the most part, Bhavana focuses most of her energies on coordinating Asai’s marathon training program.

### *Nivi*

Nivi came to the United States through an H1 transfer to work for a tech company in the United States in 2012. At her workplace in India, she had been involved in a lot of community volunteering, so she was interested in finding similar activities in the United States. She first started volunteering with an organization that provided tutoring services. Nivi was really interested in volunteering in education-related organizations and wanted to do something that was more frequent than once a month. She found out about Asai at one of their major public fundraising events. After the event, she reached out to the chapter coordinators and began attending meetings. At the time of this research, she had been volunteering for 6 months.

### *Prachi*

Prachi grew up in Delhi. She studied in law school where she met her husband. After marriage, they moved to the Midwest. Prachi studied law there and initially wanted to become an Intellectual Property lawyer, but she became interested in immigration law, and

more specifically, aiding immigrant survivors of domestic violence. While she was in law school, she became involved with Asai. She moved in 2010 and worked for a legal aid non-profit. Prachi has continued her involvement with Asai because. "it is a break from my legal aid work."

### *Pradeep*

Pradeep is one of the early founders of Asai. He now currently lives in India, where he is involved with a number of grassroots organizations and political parties. He founded Asai in 1991 while he was studying his PhD at a West Coast university. He returned to India shortly after his graduation and established an Indian-based organization to interface with Asai. In 2002, Asai distanced itself from Pradeep stating that Pradeep, "a Gandhian in his ways, is a grass-roots activist who is involved in many activities that are beyond the scope of [Asai], such as, globalization and nuclear disarmament. Most of his campaign level activities and political stands are due to his involvement with forums like Sarva Sewa Sangha (a national network of Gandhian organizations), National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM), and Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. No part of these activities are funded by Asai" (Asai Website, Accessed September 3, 2018).

### *Srinivas*

Srinivas came to the United States in 2001 to study for his Masters in the Midwest. He began working in 2003 and moved to the area where this research took place in 2007. After moving, Srinivas became involved with Asai through the marathon training program. He then got more involved with the chapter and presented a potential funding opportunity to the chapter. Srinivas' cousin runs a social service organization in Andhra Pradesh, which provides education opportunities to the children of migrant laborers. The proposal did not go through, since his cousin's organization did not have FCRA registration. Srinivas was impressed with the overall process of vetting organizations and level of detail with which the chapter assessed projects and stayed involved with the chapter work and the marathon training program.

### *Sumit*

In 2003, Sumit came to the United States to study at a university in the western United States. When he was in university, he was involved with the Vikas Sangathan chapter there but grew frustrated with the organization. When he moved after graduation, he joined Asai, "accidentally." He met his wife after moving, and she had been a social worker in the education sector. She had been involved with Asai, and that drew Sumit to become involved as well. Along with Suresh, Sumit is one of the most experienced volunteers in the chapter.

### *Suresh*

Suresh was actually born in the United States in the 1970s; his parents were foreign diplomats for the Indian government. He completed his undergraduate in India and then came to the United States for his Masters, attending university in the Midwest. He got involved with the Asai chapter at his university, which was a fairly small chapter. He moved

in 2000 and joined the chapter in this study, which was much larger than his previous chapter. Because of his long involvement in Asai, many volunteers see Suresh as the historian of the chapter. He also serves as an officer for Asai Central.

### *Vijay*

At the time of this research, Vijay was working on his MBA, so while he was still active with volunteering, he had drawn back his participation to focus on his studies. He first came to the United States to study for his Master's at a university on the East Coast in the early 2000s. He had first joined Asai while he was studying for his master's and continued his involvement when he moved to the region where this study took place. One of his initial motivations for getting involved in Asai was because his wife's family run a number of schools. Vijay's hope was that once he completed his MBA, Asai could work with those schools.



## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY ASAI AND VIKAS SANGATHAN

Below are just a few examples of some of the programs or non-profit partners supported by Asai and Vikas Sangathan.

### **Asai Funded Projects**

#### *Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti*

This project works with a non-profit school to provide education programs for the children of migrant workers. The school provides basic primary education. One of the other goals of the program is to prevent the children from becoming laborers. In the school, the children receive a mid-day meal as well. The school does outreach to parents to encourage them to keep their children in school until at least the age of 15. The program has been running for 20 years. The founders of the project, and many of the people who volunteer on the ground, are from a nearby IIT.

#### *Borderless World Foundation- Basera-e-Tabassum*

This is a girls' home located in Kashmir. Currently 178 girls, ranging from 3 to 18 years, who have been orphaned, live at this facility. The program was founded in 2002, and seeks to provide "basic rights to survival, protection, development and participation" of girls and to address their "physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration."

#### *Trichirapalli Rural and Urban Welfare Development Educational Society (TRUWDES)*

Located in Trichy, Tamil Nadu, this organization runs a number of programs, inclusive of child care center, old age homes, and schools. The school that Asai specifically supports is in a rural area in the Kodai hills. The school serves tribal children in a very remote area that has no roads, electricity, or village centers. To reach the village requires a 3-4 hour trek through reserved forests. One of the stated goals of the project is to create "the first-generation of literate/educated in these communities." With a longer term goal of eventually involving the government in providing school and other resources to this area. The school has been running since 1999.

#### *Seva Mandir- Non-Formal Education Centers*

Seva Mandir, an organization located in the state of Rajasthan provides a number of social service programs. Specifically, Asai's partnership with them supports their Non-Formal Education Centers in rural areas of Rajasthan. There are 171 centers, of which the chapter in this study supports 22. The focus of these centers is to provide education for seasonal migrant laborers and their children, and they also focus on education resources for tribals and Dalits.

## **Sangathan Projects**

### *Swarnivar*

Through this project, farmers, who live in an area of high salinity in West Bengal, receive training on organic and sustainable farming and climate change adaptation techniques. The aim of these projects has been to also improve the nutrition status of the communities. The communities in this area have been tested as being close to or having anemia. A notable achievement of this project has been reducing child undernourishment by 83%.

### *Thamate*

Thamate, the non-profit partner, works with Dalit communities in Karnataka. In fact, the name Thamate refers to the drum that is part of the community's identity. Thamate serves 800 families from scavenging communities. The project funded by Vikas Sangathan focuses on rights-based education and general education resources for adults and children. Specifically for children, they operate after-school educational support centers. In addition to education, Thamate organizes sanitation workers, both lawfully employed and those engaged in the illegal practice of manual scavenging, to press the government to enforce laws on manual scavenging.

### *Jan Swasthya Sahayog (JSS)*

JSS' name translates to People's Health Group. Located in Chhattisgarh, JSS provides a number of medical programs to *Adivasi* communities, including primary care, a leprosy clinic, and maternal health clinics. Vikas Sangathan funds their tuberculosis and leprosy clinics. The center provides nutritional and medical treatment for patients. The organization has also worked to push the government for more resources, such as providing extra food supplements for patients that have tuberculosis.

### *Critical Action Center in Movement (CACIM)*

Located in Uttarakhand, this organization receives funding to monitor the impacts of dam construction on local communities. This work also includes holding companies accountable to ensure they have received all clearances, specifically environmental clearances, before they can begin dam construction. They also work with local communities to provide them resources to know their rights about natural resource usage and displacement. They also advocate on behalf of those that have already been displaced by dams. For example, CACIM successfully brought suit against GVK, one of the companies building dams in Uttarakhand. The company paid \$1.5 million to communities impacted by the damage caused by the Srinagar Dam.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Briefing: Thank him/her for participation, introduce myself (name and profession), define the situation for the interviewee (confidentiality, recording, about 60 minutes, plus a short discussion afterwards), briefly state the purpose of the interview, and asking if the interviewee has any questions before the interview

<i>Main subjects</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
Background/History of Immigration to the United States	Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
	Tell me about when you immigrated to the United States.
	What was your experience when you first came to the US?
	How did you connect with the Indian community when you first arrived?
History of volunteering/ joining the organization	Can you tell me about any volunteering experiences you had before your joined [Organization name]?
	What are some other organizations you are involved with in the Indian American community?
	How did you get involved with [Organization name]?
	Why did you choose to get involved

	with [organization name]?
Experiences as a volunteer: project management	Tell me more about your involvement with [organization name]
	What is your role in the chapter?
	What are some of your responsibilities as a volunteer with [organization name]?
	Could you tell me about the work you are specifically doing with project partners in India?
	When thinking of your work with [organization name], what is your main goal for engaging in this work?
Functioning of the Organizations	How would you describe the way [organization name] works?
	What happens during a typical organizational meeting?
	How are disagreements in the chapter handled?
	Tell me about some of the things you have learned being involved with [organization name].

	What are some of the challenges facing [organization name]?
Linking the work of the organizations to development in India	Why was it important for you to work with an organization like [organization name]?
	Why is supporting education important to you?
	How would you define development?
	How do you see the work you are doing with [organization name] being linked with issues of development in India?
Further engagement with the organizations (mostly for veteran volunteers)	Have you ever done a site visit? Can you tell me about that experience?
	In your years volunteering with the organization, what impact has it made on you?
At the end of the interview	Are there any more things you would like to say before we end the interview?
	May I contact you, if further questions should arise?

	Thank you for your participation.

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### **EDUCATION**

**PhD Sociology**, Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs,  
Syracuse, NY 2019

**Masters in Sociology**, Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs,  
Syracuse, NY 2010

**Masters in Public and International Affairs**, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, VA 2008

**Graduate Certificate in Advanced International Affairs**, George Bush School of Government  
and Public Service, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 2006

**Bachelors of Art, Psychology**, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 2005

### **RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Philanthropy and Development, South Asian Studies, Transnational Studies, Asian American  
Studies, Globalization Theory, Social Movement Theory, Critical Theories of International  
Development, Organizational Theory, Nonprofit Studies

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

#### *Online Teaching*

**August 2018** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2018** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2018** “Great Conversations in Social Theory,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2018** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2018** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2018** “Great Conversations in Social Theory,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2017** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2017** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2017** “Great Conversations in Social Theory,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2017** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2017** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College

**Summer 2016** “Environment and Social Inequality,” Online Course, Syracuse University

**August 2016** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**January 2016** “Research Methods for the Social Sciences,” Online Course, Empire State  
College

**January 2016** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2015** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College

**August 2015** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**Summer 2015** “Environmental Sociology,” Online Course, Syracuse University  
**January 2015** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**August 2014** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**August 2014** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**August 2014** “Exploring Society,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**Fall 2014** “Sociology of Sports,” Online Course, Ohlone College  
**Summer 2014** “Introduction to Sociology,” Online course, Ohlone College  
**Summer 2014** “Environmental Sociology,” Online Course, Syracuse University  
**May 2014** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**January 2014** “Environmental Sociology,” Online Course, Syracuse University  
**January 2014** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**January 2014** “Introduction to Sociology,” Online Course, Ohlone College  
**August 2013** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course, Empire State College  
**August 2013** “Environmental Sociology,” Online Course at Syracuse University  
**August 2013** “Introduction to Sociology,” Online Course at Ohlone College  
**May 2013** “Environmental Sociology,” Online Course at Syracuse University  
**May 2013** “Introduction to Sociology,” Online Course at Ohlone College  
**Jan 2013** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course at Empire State College  
**Jan 2013** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course at Empire State College  
**Sept 2012** “Qualitative Research Methods,” Online Course at Empire State College  
**Sept 2012** “Contemporary Global Social Issues,” Online Course at Empire State College  
**March 2012** “Family and Society,” Online Course at Empire State College

*In Class Lecturing*

**Spring 2014** Sociology 242, Sociology of Sports, Ohlone College, Fremont, California  
**Spring 2013** Sociology 101, Ohlone College, Newark, California

*Graduate Student Instructor:*

**2011 Spring** Urban Sociology, Lab Assistant with Dr. Arthur Paris, Syracuse University  
**2011 Spring** Contemporary Asian Americans with Dr. Prema Kurien, Syracuse University  
**2010 Fall** Qualitative Methods with Dr. Marj DeVault, Syracuse University  
**2010 Spring** Urban Sociology with Dr. Arthur Paris, Syracuse University  
**2010 Spring** Introduction to Sociology with Dr. Arthur Paris, Syracuse University  
**2009 Fall** Social Problems, Discussion Sections, with Dr. Arthur Paris, Syracuse University  
**2009 Spring** Introduction to Sociology, Discussion Sections, with Dr. Dee Britton, Syracuse U.

*Guest Lecture:*

**2012 Spring** Bing Seminar, Rural Change and Social Impact in India, Stanford University  
**2010 Fall** “*Maximum City: Mumbai and Global Cities in India.*” *Millennial Cities* taught by Dr. Arthur Paris

**INVITED PRESENTATIONS**

**2011** “Framing Culpability: Discourses on Farmers’ Suicide and Development Organizations.” South Asia Center, Syracuse University (February)

- 2010 “The Social and Political Milieu of Farmers’ Suicide in Maharashtra.” Visiting Scholar Presentation, Gujarat Institute for Development Research (July)

### **CONFERENCES**

- 2014 “The School that Hope Built: Transnational Philanthropy and Education Funding in India.” Presented at *Michigan State Migration Studies Graduate Student Conference*, Michigan State University (October)
- 2012 “From *Mother India* to *Peepli Live*: Cinematic Representations of Rural India and New Urban Audiences.” Presented at *South Asia by the Bay Graduate Student Conference*, Stanford University (May)
- 2012 “Ecological Modernization from Below: Enabling Social Actor Involvement Through the Right to Information Act.” Presented at *The International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic, and Social Sustainability*, Vancouver, BC, Canada (January)
- 2011 “Doubly Globalized: Farmers’ Suicide in Vidarbha, India” Presented at *Hong Kong Sociological Association Meeting*, Hong Kong (December)
- 2011 “Framing Culpability: Discourses on Farmers’ Suicide and Development Organization.” Roundtable Discussion, *Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting*, Philadelphia, PA (February)
- 2011 “Framing Culpability: Discourses on Farmers’ Suicide and Development Organizations.” Presented at *Texas Asia Conference*, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. (February)
- 2010 “Framing Culpability: Globalization and Farmers’ Suicide in Maharashtra” *Graduate Student Symposium, Department of Sociology*, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York (November)
- 2010 “Development, Government Policy, and the Naxalite Movement in Chhattisgarh” *Spring Symposium, Center for South Asia Studies*, University of Hawaii, Manoa, Honolulu, HI (April)
- 2009 “Transnationalism and Locally-Based Resistance to Globalization” Poster Session, *Development and Social Transformation Symposium*, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse, New York (April)
- 2008 “India’s Naxalite Movement: The Impacts of Development and Government Repression on Activism in the State of Chhattisgarh” *International Studies Association Northeast Meeting*, Baltimore Maryland (October)

### **PUBLICATIONS**

White, Bernadette. 2013. “Ecological Modernization from Below: Enabling Social Actor Involvement through the Right to Information.” *International Journal of Sustainability Policy and Practice*. 8. 37-48.

White, Bernadette. 2007. “Power and Relief: Foucault Applied to the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake Relief Efforts” Institute for Policy and Governance, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. <http://www.ipg.vt.edu/Papers.htm>

*Second Author:*

Schewe, Rebecca L. and White, Bernadette. 2017. “Who Works Here? Contingent Labor, Nonfamily Labor, and Immigrant Labor on U.S. Dairy Farms.” *Social Currents*. 4(5). 429-447.

## **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- 2011 American Institute for Indian Studies, Summer Marathi Language Program** (Pune, India)
- 2010 Independent Research, Research Scholar at Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Studies** (Mumbai, India)
- 2009 American Institute for Indian Studies, Summer Hindi Language Program** (Jaipur, India)
- 2008 International Agriculture and Rural Development**, Cornell University (Chiapas, Mexico)
- 2007 Summer In India Program**, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (New Delhi, Aligarh, Agra, Jaipur)- Hindi Language Instruction
- 2006 Seminar on the Political Economy of India**, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, India)

## **LANGUAGE COMPETENCY**

English (native) French (advanced), Hindi (advanced), Tamil (intermediate), Marathi (intermediate), Spanish (beginner)

## **EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES**

### **Corporate Philanthropy Officer, Second Harvest Food Bank (October 2016- present)**

- Interface with a number of community organizations, faith-based organizations, schools, and small corporations as their point of contact with Second Harvest Food Bank.
- Represent the Food Bank at various public events, including speaking on behalf of the Food Bank.
- Create lesson plans and resources for teachers to educate about food insecurity, hunger, and the work of the Food Bank.
- Act as a resource for groups engaging in Food & Fund Drives, and ensuring that their drives are successful.

### **Outreach Coordinator, Center for South Asia, Stanford University (August 2011- October 2016)**

- Plan events for the Center for South Asia, each quarter, which consists of 2 to 3 workshops and symposiums a quarter and weekly lecture programs.
- Engage students and faculty at Stanford University that have an interest in South Asia.
- Interface with the local community for Center outreach programs and projects, such as linking up students with the Boys and Girls Club of East Palo Alto, for educational outreach programs.
- Build, maintain and update the Center's webpage using Drupal, a content manager webpage builder.
- Create promotional materials for Center events and programs and a biannual magazine using InDesign and Photoshop.

### **Center for Distance Learning, Empire State College (August 2011- present)**

- Instructor and Course Developer

- Develop curriculum for online-administered classes aimed for non-traditional and adult students
- Instructor for courses “Family and Society,” “Qualitative Research Methods,” and “Contemporary Global Social Issues.”

**Adjunct Professor, Ohlone College, Division of Arts and Sciences (January 2013- August 2014)**

- Develop and plan course syllabus for an Introductory Sociology class.
- Lecture, advise, and teach 60 students of diverse educational tracks and backgrounds.
- Develop and teach an online Introductory Sociology class in Blackboard
- Design and teach an interactive summer Sociology course for elementary students, as part of Ohlone College’s “Ohlone for Kids” Summer program.

**Adjunct Professor/Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology, Syracuse University (August 2008- August 2014)**

- Develop and direct an advanced online Sociology course, Environmental Sociology and advise students on major research projects.
- Lead discussion sections, of 25 students each, for freshman level Sociology courses
- Mentor and advise students on research projects and labs in upper level courses
- Created a syllabus for Sociology 101, on short notice and with a short deadline
- Key researcher for professor’s project on public opinion and climate change, published in Routledge’s *Handbook of Climate Change and Society*.

**GRANTS AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS**

**Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship, Summer 2011**

**Roscoe Martin Dissertation Research Award, Awarded Fall 2010**

**Research Featured in the Maxwell Dean’s Report, Fall 2010**

**Bharati Summer Fellowship, Moynihan Institute, recipient for Summer 2010**

**Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship, recipient for Summer 2009**

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

Board Member, VP Membership, Association of Fundraising Professionals

Member, American Sociological Association

Webmaster, ASA Section on Development Sociology

Member, Society for the Study of Social Problems

Member, International Sociological Association

**COMPUTER SKILLS**

Salesforce

Raiser’s Edge

Microsoft Office Suite: Word, PowerPoint, Excel

Drupal/Content Manager

Adobe Suite (Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, Acrobat)

Moodle Online Classroom Services

Blackboard

Apple computing experience

SPSS