TRANSNATIONALIZING INDIAN EDUCATION: DIASPORIC NETWORKS, POLITICS AND PARTICIPATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which policy ideas in education are produced, legitimated and promoted through transnational networks. The relationship between India's education policy and its skilled diasporic networks is at the center of my inquiry. The entry of non-state actors and capital flows in Indian education provides a broader context to situate the three diasporic organizations I study: Asha for Education, Pratham-USA, and Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation. The three organizations are involved in supporting a range of educational initiatives in India.

Surfaced after the period of post-1965 immigration act in general and the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1990) in particular, the space of skilled diasporic organizations is seen as an opportunity for knowledge transfer, economic development and transnational collaboration. Paying attention to the overarching contexts as well as specific advocacy issues supported by the diasporic groups, I analyze the politics and practices of networks through which the conversations about India’s education policy are taking place. The three organizations differ from each other in terms of their constituencies, the vision for education and their engagements with India-based groups. Yet, there are similarities in terms of the non-profit, NGO structures through which the organizations operate and the advocacy positions they take.

The data show the ways in which the organizations construct a set of narratives around the idea of 'education reform' in India and how their social actions are shaped by three factors: Networked transnationalism, negotiation of identity, and the power of 'development' approach in education. My analysis pays attention to the interaction of multiple discourses that go on to create the transnational networks of education-action,
intervention and advocacy. The diasporan 'solution' spaces link, collaborate, and draw ideas from international funding agencies, multilateral institutions, the Indian state, corporations, NGOs and think tanks. The advocacy ideas, as a result, are products of such multi-level influences.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

“We are not sure if we have enough chalk for next week, but every school around here has a partner NGO to work with...”, chuckled my friend who had been working as an elementary school teacher for over two decades in the state of Maharashtra, India. He had just attended two workshops organized by the local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) -- one on the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classroom, and the other on writing small grants. What he jokingly alluded to is in fact a series of changes in Indian education that has been fast moving away from central control and central planning. The entry of extra-state actors in education, greater reliance on public-private partnerships, and increasing decentralization are emblematic of the broader changes in public policy in India over the past few years (Kumar, 2006; Chopra, Jeffery & Reifeld, 2005; Mehrotra, 2006). The new arrangements and networks that have become active in the various educational projects in India are central to my dissertation project. In particular, I study three diasporic educational action groups that collaborate with a number of actors including southern and northern NGOs, foundations, private donors, corporations, central, state and local governments, school boards, education researchers and others. Examining the cultural politics of diasporic action as well as the heightened interaction between various actors, this dissertation explores how India’s education policy is informed and shaped by various networks of knowledge, identity and power.

Paying attention to the changing policy relevance of skilled migrants, the circuits of transnational advocacy and action and the issues around which these networks develop, my research analyzes the politics of a set of complex and competing processes, sites and
knowledge through which the policy conversations about India’s education are taking place. As the chapters show, there are technological, cultural and ideological forces that are part of the ever-increasing arrangements of the numerous organizations involved in India’s education sector. In what has become a signature aspect of the social life of information age, the Indian diasporic organizations are important players in the networked transnationalism that opens up many ways to participate in Indian social life from afar (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Wiest, 2008). As the diasporic organizations provide financial support to NGOs and civic groups and initiate their own projects including textbook production, teacher education, curriculum design and learning assessment, their engagements result in developing ideas about India’s educational challenges, vision and policy. This is interesting, primarily because the space of diasporic action and engagement is different from the traditional, conditional aid by multilateral agencies. The social morphology of small-scale diasporic/migrant/hometown circuits destabilizes the standard accounts of nation, migration and cultural globalization. While the economic arrangements of the capitalist system require workers to follow capital, it is the innovative transnational practices that are increasingly able to re-route, and to an extent reverse the flows of capital, information, commodity and imagination. (Vertovec, 2004; Portes, 2006; Aneesh, 2000).

**Diasporas, Transnational Actions and Policy**

The links between diasporas and their ancestral homelands have become focal points of academic inquiry in recent years (Bose, 2008; Grewal, 2005; Bhaskaran, 2006; Maira, 2004; Portes, 2005). For many scholars, the analytic space involving diasporas is fast becoming crucial in thinking through some of the complexities of contemporary global
identity that is mired in juxtaposing constructs such as mobility and displacement, information overload and isolation, cosmopolitanism and cultural chauvinism to name a few. Accelerated by technology, the cultural practices of diasporas have redefined the notions of community, culture and work. Economic migration and transnational collaboration have been primary sources of social and cultural transformation in both the sending and host countries (Vertovec, 1999; Glick Schiller et al, 1992; Hannerz, 1997; Castells, 1998; 2004). The unprecedented growth of transnational networks of various kinds has coincided with the increasing efforts by national governments to utilize the potential of transnational capital, practices and relationships. Diasporas are identified as development opportunities, and as a result, they have managed to capture the focus of policy in many countries (Lowell, 2004; Sriskandarajah, 2002; Saxenian, 2002).

Increasingly, the research focusing on the interconnected relationship between global capitalism, skilled diasporas and policy changes has stated that the ‘diaspora option’ pursued by many countries in the third world is largely a response to the diminishing foreign aid and an excessive brain drain. (Meyer, 1999; Kapur & McHale, 2004). As states have engaged in designing newer policy proposals around diaspora, their political roles have shrunk in some realms and expanded in other.

**Statement of Problem**

This dissertation explores the politics of diasporic educational actions in the context of India’s education policy. Since 1990, diasporic action groups have entered in the conversations about education. Rightfully, the Indian education system is identified as a space that needs maximum attention and urgent, meaningful policy interventions. The
diasporic groups that have become visible in educational action and advocacy in recent years, have lent their support to a range of initiatives including infrastructural support, capacity building, teacher education, and more recently, the Right to Education (RTE) bill. The possible involvement of a range of non-state and state organizations and agencies is characteristics of the nature of new governance, which is increasingly becoming horizontal and layered with tiers of small and large organizations participating in the process. In education, the emergence of the networks of private, public and voluntary actors working across different geographical and political spheres has become an important mode through which policy is managed and delivered (Malhotra, 2005; Janni, 1999). Being a first-time immigrant, I turned to immigrant/diasporic networks for information, comfort and connectivity. My familiarity with Indian diasporic networks allowed me to see a high proportion of organizations working in education and their fundraising practices. The engagements of these groups in transnational circuits of information, alliance and action presented a compelling case. For one, the diasporic actions highlighted new ways of framing collaborative work. The images, stories, fund-raising materials, reportage to donors can be understood as powerful texts on education, transnationalism, development and nationalism.

In India, the overall economic shift toward liberalization was underway since 1980s, owing to varied international pressures. With the onset of economic liberalization, India’s policy towards its vast diasporic population significantly changed, and the term ‘non-resident-Indian (NRI)’ found a place in policy as well as cultural texts. India’s recent economic growth and its connection to the growing practices of transnationalism have received scholarly attention. (Tendulkar, 2003; Arora & Alfonso, 2004; Bose, 2008). While the ramifications of India’s policy towards its diaspora are highly disputed, what seems to
have found consensus among the critics and supporters of the new policy direction is that Indian skilled diaspora will play a crucial role in shaping the policy (Singh, 2007; Chatterji, 2007; Patil, 2008). Over the past few decades, the Indian government has created economic and social opportunities for the diaspora to channel their investments, entrepreneurialism, specialized knowledge, remittances and charitable contributions (Biswas, 2005; Shukla, 2003).

As diasporic action groups become part of the larger educational networks, they negotiate boundaries and define their own agendas. In this dissertation, I focus on the practices and ideologies of three diasporic action groups as they form common ground to work with other network actors while developing their own approach to being a social action group. Thus, I look at the practices of these groups as well as specific policy interventions they support. The three organizations I study are Asha for Education, Pratham and Ekal Foundation that continue to have different degrees of involvement in supporting educational actions in India. In studying the three groups my inquiry is informed by the following research questions:

1. What constitutes the diasporic/transnational action space?
2. What issues have become parts of the transnational educational actions?
3. What issues do not get diasporic support and advocacy?
4. How does the diasporic expert knowledge play out in the policy process?
5. How do states reach out and seek the opinions of some diasporic constituencies while not engaging with others?

The broad theoretical orientation for the study is that of critical policy analysis, migrant transnationalism and diaspora studies, with a focus on analyzing relationships between official knowledge, networked actions and social practices. The key strands that help
construct my analysis involve understanding how conversations about India’s education policy are linked to global discourses surrounding effective structuring of education. Critical policy analysis framework offers the intellectual space to view relationships among various actors, sites and practices and to understand their implications for education. The framework of migrant transnationalism helps situate the numerous ways in which contemporary migrants are able to connect and construct political actions. I turn to diaspora studies, especially the scholarship in South Asian diaspora to understand how debates about class, caste, citizenship, gender, sexuality profoundly shape diasporan experiences, organizations and participatory possibilities. In my analysis I pay careful attention to the ways in which a particular language is used to create messages and descriptions about education in India, leading up to the justification of a particular kind of reform and actions. Several terms such as ‘development’, ‘access’, ‘community empowerment’, and ‘participation’ occur frequently in my data. Given that the vocabulary of social action is produced, reproduced and appropriated in the context of its social currency, it is important to examine both the overt meanings and their covert signification.

**Genealogy of Diasporic Networks**

Much has been written about how the flows of global capital and labor have circumscribed the nation state, particularly the territorial and governmental borders of the state. The intensification of mobility, greater permeability of borders and interconnectivity has shaped the questions of identity and community that the diasporic groups grapple with. In this context,

State and nation, once enclosed in the same territorial boundaries, have been decoupled through international migration and the rise of diasporic communities.
While the state continues to exist inside its legal and inherent jurisdictional territories, the nation has expanded to include what had been extraterritorial sites, which have now been converted into transnational sites. (Cited in Biswas, 2005:47).

The spaces of diasporic networks and organization often involve the contradictory politics that engages in both the reproduction of the state and resistance to it. Just as the term ‘diasporic Indian community’ the diasporic social spaces and networks cannot be theorized without acknowledging the inadequacy of the state—crafted language. The oft-used terms such American/Asian-Indian/resident/specialty skilled migrant not only erase the historicity and the immense heterogeneity within the diaspora, but they can lead to disastrous political implications. What interests me most as how the historical complexity of the immigration from India and the multiple fractures within the diaspora carve out political spaces that at times build on the essentialized conceptions of identity.

The promulgation of transnational, diasporic networks, particularly those operating through a variety of electronic media present a response to the geographic dispersion and territorial control on the one hand and the innovations in the global communications industry on the other. How does one begin to think about the Indian diasporic networks as they emerge from the political/institutional space in the United States and draw from a range of cultural materials? The networks include professional organizations, religious groups, business and cultural organizations to name a few. The makeup of diasporic action space is closely connected to the immigration trends from India in the context of post-1965 reforms. Given that the specialty and technical labor that migrated to the United States beginning 1970s possessed social capital, the diasporic organizations too developed influential alliances with Indian networks. Articulating Indian diasporic social space, many scholars have paid attention to diasporic organizations/networks of various kinds. Vijay Prashad’s The Karma of
Brown Folk (2000), for instance, centrally engages with the history and politics of desi political actions in the United States. Discussing the various migrant streams, the text also brings together the travels of ‘authentic’ cultural imagery, the inception of long-distance Hindutva, and the development of progressive South Asian activism. The analysis of desi networks, however, is carried out using rather flat and uncomplicating explanations revolving around ‘migrants’ cultural response, the sense of responsibility and the framework of charity (Prashad, 2000:120). More recent works on diaspora, particularly those that are built on the feminist, third world and critical transnational scholarship make the conscious effort to see the heterogeneity of the diaspora and tease apart the economic and ideological forces that are embedded in the manifestations of cultural organizations. Monica Das Gupta’s (2007) ethnographic focus on the progressive South Asian organizations and Inderpal Grewal’s analysis of the consumer and cultural components of the transnational identity formation are both important contributions to thinking critically about the diasporic political space of action, organization and identity. The resourcefulness of transnational ties among skilled migrants is an important aspect of Annalee Saxenian’s work (2002) that explores the formation of professional networks between the skilled diasporas in Silicon Valley and some of the urban, technology centers in their home states. Such circuits, according to Saxenian, are emblematic of the transformation in ways that migrant experiences are understood.

The organizations in my study emerged out of a particular moment in the post-1965 immigration history. Subsequently, the development of accommodation and inclusion oriented diasporic political organizing of the 1980s, the further intensification of migration following immigration reforms and the emergence of networks as useful tools of political organizing are some of the significant junctures. The idea of networks as politically viable
options is also related to the entry of the idea of development-centered actions that began to be occupying transnational realm of public actions, even as the main players included multilateral agencies, INGOs who were located in the developed world but were active in supporting initiatives in the third world. Emerged out of the structural specificities of immigrant social life, the diasporic social space contains a range of networks developed out of social relationships, professional interests or other similar ties.

**Organization and Language**

A note about language is in order, perhaps clarification, regarding some of the terms that I use throughout this text: “Liberalization”, “Third World”, and “skilled diaspora”. These terms are quite loaded and have particular histories and contexts in which they are employed. As a political entity, the “Third World” is said to have lost its coherence, given the disintegration of the political/ideological front. However, a number of scholars continue to use the term for it most directly draws attention to the post-war geopolitics, the system of social and economic intervention of the North, and the planning and vision of the newly independent states in Asia and Africa. The term ‘liberalization’ used here refers to the set of reforms carried out in India beginning 1980s that shifted focus from import-substitution to deregulation and privatization. Finally, despite my dislike I have retained the term ‘skilled diaspora’ that is officially used to describe workers in relation to their specialized training, formal expertise and higher wages. Each of these is a heterogeneous category with multiple meanings, and my choice is largely determined by convenience.

Each chapter of this dissertation is structured around capturing the relationship between diasporic networks and education and exploring the politics of social actions.
Chapter 2 discusses the concept of knowledge economy and the ways in which the states have come up with ‘diaspora options’ in order to employ the technological and entrepreneurial skills of diasporas toward economic growth. The chapter examines policy documents including ‘National Knowledge Commission (NKC)’ by the Government of India and Education for Development (E4D) and Education for Knowledge Economy (EKE) by the World Bank.

The next chapter turns to some of the theoretical works on diaspora and traces the recent changes in India’s policy towards its expatriates. Through business and technological collaborations and events such as ‘Overseas Indian Day’, the diasporic subjects are re-nationalized. As it reaches out to extend the legal and business opportunities to diaspora, the state’s selective engagements underscore the logics of neoliberalism that construct the skilled and entrepreneurial diasporic subject as a legitimate participant in India’s progress.

Chapter four focuses on the methodological issues. I present a number of issues I encountered during my research. The discussion is based on the complexities involved in researching organizations and my role as researcher. The data for this project include policy reports prepared by the State and supra-national agencies, documents produced by three diasporic organizations and semi structured interviews conducted with their members. Descriptions and analysis of data are worked out in chapters 5 and 6. Based on the data gathered, I present three narratives in chapter 5 that depict the vision and practices of Asha, Pratham and Ekal and provide an analysis of their engagements. Drawing on the analysis in chapter 5, the next chapter offers interpretations by paying attention to the politics of educational actions.
Significance

This work departs from the conception of policy as exclusively state-centered production, and policy analysis as solely concerned with impact. As a number of scholars have recently pointed out, while the state continues to be the central author of policy, it has been profoundly shaped by varied trans-supra and sub national forces. Employing critical readings of diasporic interventions and changes in Indian education policy, this dissertation examines the ways in which larger economic imperatives influence the direction of education policy. As the following chapters demonstrate, financial and ideological flows into Indian education most clearly highlight the policy dilemmas on the part of the state that must secure transnational capital to sustain its economic agenda and be present to address the concerns of its citizenry and domestic policy issues around which the civic political struggles occur.
Chapter 2

Transnationalism, Skilled Diaspora, Education

Diaspora knowledge networks have deeply changed the way in which highly skilled mobility is looked at. They have conceptually subverted the traditional “brain drain” migration outflow into a “brain gain” skills circulation by converting the loss of human resources into a remote although accessible asset of expanded networks Meyer & Wattiaux, 2006:5

Parhna-likhna Seekho o Mehnet Karne Walon; Parhna-likhna Seekho o Bhook Se Marne Walon… / Learn to read and write, oh laborers Learn to read and write, oh those dying of hunger… Song, National Literacy Mission, India, 1978

Opening the Debate

Sprawled over two-hundred acres, the campus of Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad adorns lovely landscaped greenery amidst the scorching summer heat.

Cyberabad, as the newly developed part of the town is called, showcases, along with ISB, a number of information technology parks and back-room offices for multinational corporations. In seven short years since it started, the Indian School of Business (ISB) has moved up in its ranking (15th in the world) and now partners with several international business schools including the Kellogg School of Management, Wharton Business School and the London Business School. ISB was founded collaboratively by India’s diasporan entrepreneurs and the state of Andhra Pradesh to provide an organized platform for business learning. The school’s confusing-yet-catchy self-description “Western infrastructure, Indian heart and a global soul” hints at the changed social landscape of Hyderabad after its reintroduction to the world as an information-technology hub. The idea of ISB emerged from the official recognition that there needs to be a world-class business school in India that
would respond to the “leadership needs of emerging Asian economies” (Indian School of Business, 2008). The expanding information technology industry in India and the transnationalization of academic work, especially in the fields of business and management were driving forces behind the formation of ISB. Recognizing India’s newfound engagement with knowledge-based industries, the wealthy members of diaspora have played an active part in this school from the very beginning. The urgency that brought ISB to the forefront was not to construct an institutional space for Indian industry or Indian public in general, but to train students that would be better equipped to work for global markets. This thinking is part of the shift in Indian higher education that is underway over the last two decades (Patel, 2003; Agarwal, 2006; Tilak, 2005). Flexible and technologically proficient skilled worker is at the center of the image of new India. The popular narrative of India’s economic success almost invariably includes technological, cultural and capital investments by its diaspora. Indian finance minister P. Chidambaram authenticated this when he specifically talked about what India needs most from its vast diaspora. “...More than material resources, it is knowledge that needs to be tapped from overseas Indians to sustain India's growth” (SiliconIndia, 2007). Chidambaram’s explicit connection between knowledge and diaspora is illustrative of the state support for projects such as ISB.

Compared to the recent and direct diasporan involvement in Indian higher education, the transnational actions in K-12 education have different degrees of involvement and they go back several years. While different from each other in scale and ideological makeup, most diasporic organizations that work in the K-12 action networks are built on the following shared assumptions: (a) knowledge, especially in its technological and institutional forms has been central to India’s economic growth, (b) the existing education system is incapable of
providing quality access to education, and (c) civic, participatory actions can lead to educational change. This chapter focuses on the kinds of transnational and diasporic social spaces that help facilitate the formation of action networks in education. A conceptual review of the recent scholarship on transnationalism and diaspora formation is useful in order to understand both, the rapid growth of diasporan involvement in supporting a range of social actions, and policy responses that in turn, enhance the speed, scope and breadth of such exchanges. I argue that the entry of skilled diasporas in the Indian policy discourse is produced alongside India’s recent policy direction toward knowledge economy. The prerogative for knowledge industry and skilled diasporas are both embedded in India’s liberalized economic direction. Transnational action work occurs through multiple alliances, networks and with actors working at regional, national, local and supra-national realms. The interrelated debates around skilled labor migration, transnational connectivity and struggles over identity influence how diasporas organize.

This chapter presents a literature review from the debates on transnationalism in order to think through some of the complexities involved in understanding the connections between migrant practices, education policy and national expectations from the diasporas. I am most interested in bringing to light how despite their different proportions, the changes in India’s higher education and primary education policy are crucial in order to understand the transnationality of education action. The shifts in higher education have largely contributed to the formation of skilled, transnational diaspora, whereas the actions of desi diasporic networks have largely remained focused on primary education and to a lesser extent, secondary and vocational education.
I begin the discussion with a brief conceptual review of transnationalism, focusing on the relevance and meaning of trans-border alliances and migrant cultural practices. Following the thread, the next section explores the construct of “skilled” migrant in relation to the development of their home-states. A review of knowledge economy and its role in furthering particular kinds of reforms in higher education in India is discussed at length, as the chapter focuses on the twin policy paradigms: ‘knowledge-based’ and ‘diaspora based’ approaches to development. By looking at some of the important shifts in higher education and primary education, the chapter highlights multi-directional involvement and movement of education-advocacy networks that are linked to each other through migration, education and ideas.

**Transnationalism: Theoretical Underpinnings**

Global circulation of labor from developing countries to advanced economies as well as real and virtual connectivity has opened new possibilities for economic growth for developing countries. It is instructive to turn to some of the conceptual underpinnings of transnationalism in order to understand the ways in which diasporas play a role in national development and how states have created conditions for a smooth transfer of capital and skills from transnational migrants. Creation and sustenance of diasporic networks and their close connections with numerous “home based” groups have become an integral part of transnational practices. Scholars across many disciplines have theorized the emergence and significance of transnational activities that have, by now, become characteristic of the social organizing of immigrant groups. The dramatic increase in the flow of information, people and capital across national borders can be attributed to a confluence of technological, financial and institutional changes since 1970s. (Vertovec, 2004; Ong & Nonini, 1997;
The conjoining forces of economic globalization, reformulation of immigration laws and an ever-expanding reach of communication technologies offer a broader context to understand the emergence of a wide array of transnational practices (Basch et al, 1994; Castles, 1998). While transnational social actions are by no means new phenomena, what is new is an upsurge in the number of networks formed in an ever-increasing field of civil society engagements that occur with diverse actors linked to each other through global circuits of communication and production. Global interconnections shaped largely by the increasing flow of information, ideas, imagination, products and human beings also shape the diverse ways in which individuals come together in action to make sense of their place and role in an accelerated global dynamics of interconnection and interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2000). As Ong (2003), Harvey (2002), and others observe, the intensification of global connectedness coincides with the progressive decentralization of capitalism. Similarly, global interconnectivity and interdependence are historically and materially constituted. The thriving global hybridity and cosmopolitanism have occurred on an iniquitous terrain, with most of the world’s populations living in disparate material conditions and working with measly political resources on their hands to change their circumstances. Such profound contrasts have underscored a need to better establish the links between solidarity, social actions and governance. In ways that would be unimaginable a few decades ago, organizations and individuals active on local, regional, sub-national, national, transnational levels can collaborate with each other. For years, the sovereign states were players in the field of social action that now involves non-state actors such as charities, social movements, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, international and transnational organizations, and
multinational corporations. As new alliances are formed between the local, national and transnational, the blurred boundaries attest to new practices in collective work. In its common usage, the term transnational broadly refers to global connectivity as well as an organization of social life that falls outside of the purview of national scales. From cross border cultural collaborations to small import-export ventures, and from hometown committees to political campaigns for the country of origin, transnational social field involves a wide range of economic, political and social spheres of immigrant lives. Broadly, transnational activities refer to a web of social linkages that transcend geographical and political borders of one nation, yet continue to be relevant to both, the diaspora and the country of origin. (Roberts et.al., 1999; Itzigsohn et al, 2002). These multiple, generative ties are instrumental in enabling the conditions within which, despite greater physical distances, relationships with people, groups and institutions across borders are formed and sustained.

Looking at the emerging transnational circuits within the debates on globalization, the interdisciplinary scholarship has made it clear that contemporary transnational social practices are offshoots of global modernity (Appadurai, 2001; Burawoy, 2000). Recent works on transnational social action have draws from disciplines such as cultural studies, diaspora studies and international migration in order to probe the questions of identity, citizenship and political power that play a role in constructing transnational space. Migration has been central to sustain the economic system of capitalism and colonialism that required the colonized/exploited labor to travel to the sites of production (Breman 1985; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2004). Building on this line of thinking, the concept of transnationalism has come to be employed as a useful tool to understand the asymmetrical links between Third and First World nations in the context of recent histories of colonization, decolonization and
economic globalization on the one hand, and the material and cultural effects of these processes on the other (Abelmann and Lie 1995; Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). Similarly, Alejandro Portes (1995; 2000; 2005) argues that contemporary migrants are able to participate in two societies at once as individuals or through institutions and they devise newer ways to maintain ties with their home-base as they operate in the places of capital accumulation.

**Transnational Action**

Acknowledging the growth of non-state actors in social spheres and their actions that are both independent of and in collaboration with the state, Khagram (2005) and Portes (2000) provide descriptive accounts and typologies in order to account for the diverse agendas and practices these organizations bring. Portes (2000) presents three broad types of actors and three domains. As for migrant transnationalism, Portes considers simple and clear division between NGOs that he purports to be of larger scope and explicit social purpose, and hometown associations that work on inter-personal bases.

Table 1

*Typology of Transnational Action: Modified from Portes (2000)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>Embassies/diplomatic organizations</td>
<td>Export drives</td>
<td>Academic, Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational</td>
<td>U.N and similar Agencies</td>
<td>Global corporations</td>
<td>Religious Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational</td>
<td>NGOs, Hometown committees</td>
<td>Immigrant businesses</td>
<td>Charities Performances etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on their scope, strength and alliance building, Khagram (2003) posits four major types of organizations:

1. International Non Governmental Organizations (INGOs) that are involved in a number of countries and are organized around a set of identified goals.
2. Transnational Networks that work in alliance with NGOs and community organizations.
3. Transnational Coalitions involving higher degrees of coordination and partnerships with international donor agencies.
4. Transnational Social Movements that are built on solidarity and empathy and work towards enhancing the power of civil society.

Going beyond the role-governed descriptions, Castells (2000) views the work of networks connected to the process of constructing identity. Social action groups employ a range of cultural, technological and fantasy-based materials to rearrange the meanings in order to suit their particular social structures. The identity work by non-state actors, according to Castells, produces (a) Legitimizing Identity, that rationalizes the norms set up by dominant institutions and orders, (b) Resistance Identity, that rejects the norms, and (c) Project Identity, that uses available cultural forms to build new meanings around which newer forms of identities can be built.

**Relevance of Skilled Diasporas**

Governments around the world are beginning to think about their expatriate populations in new ways. Rather than expatriate business, cultural, scientific and policy actors being understood as ‘lost’ to their countries of origin, active efforts are now being made to identify and link highly skilled offshore citizens to national economic development projects through initiatives such as formal mentoring programmes, international advisory boards, and investment programmes. Diaspora Strategies are most often found in those countries that have experienced “brain drain” and so are having difficulty accessing the capital and skills needed to succeed in the global economy. (Global HigherEd, 2008)
Manifest through the workings of financial, cultural and technological relationships the ‘diaspora strategies’ referred above demonstrate how nation states and immigrant organizations have come together in constructing a collaborative working space outside of national territorial bounds. The importance of knowledge and knowledge workers in the overall national development is long recognized. Some of the early attempts to get skilled diasporas involved in their country of origin were instituted by UNDP through initiatives such as Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) that involved skilled members of the diaspora going back to their country for up to six months in order to help utilize their knowledge. TOKEN initiatives, however, were not successful in establishing sustained collaboration between diasporas and their countries of origin. On the other hand, community-led, non-hierarchical networks of action have shown consistent growth. Innovations in communication technologies have been instrumental in the formation of transnational collaborations across borders. The stupendous growth and effectiveness of transnational organizations has opened up ‘parallel power structures’ that the states can no longer afford to ignore.

The paradigm of technologization and informationalization of work and culture is at the center of the rearticulation of diasporas as new knowledge sources. The ubiquitous ‘knowledge’ prefix attached to an ever increasing terms such as ‘knowledge management’, ‘knowledge engineering’ and ‘knowledge capitalism’ points out just how well-placed the discourse of knowledge economy has become. The commonly held understanding of knowledge economy is based on the premise that investments in knowledge-intensive sectors would lead to economic growth. Learning and innovation are at the center of the contemporary understanding of knowledge economy, which is articulated in terms of
widespread use of information, absorption of technology into the processes of production and a higher proportion information-related labor. (Foray, 2004; Powell & Snellman, 2004; David & Foray, 2003; Peters, 2001).

The role of knowledge in economy is not new; neither is the recognition that knowledge acquisition has social benefits. Scholars have paid attention to the ways in which scientific knowledge became central to the capitalist State (Poulantzas, 1974; Bordieu & Passeron, 1990; Freire, 1974). Knowledge was considered ‘national’ in character in that the state defined the scientificity of knowledge, regulated it and put it to use within national boundaries. The state was invested in the advancement of scientific knowledge in two specific ways: scientific innovation was designed primarily within the military industrial complex, and knowledge apparatus was often deployed to help restore the norm of dominant classes (Carnoy & Castells, 2001; Gordon and Kimball 1998). In the context of global expansion of information, however, the national character of knowledge has changed. Rapid de-militarization of scientific and technological knowledge and liberalization of telecommunications have moved the regulatory scale for knowledge from national to global. This is largely because the dominant capitalist values and norms are increasingly organized around knowledge that is produced and circulated in service of the global profit-making endeavors. Even as many distinct forms of high-value knowledge are actually produced within national frameworks, the production involves trans/multi national circuits and it is often in accordance with the demands of global economy.

Long before ‘knowledge economy’ became a prized policy buzzword, Fritz Machlup (1962) published his work that sought to measure knowledge in relation to economic production and distribution. Estimating that knowledge-based economy accounted for 29%
of the US GNP in 1958, Machlup put forth some predictions. First, knowledge-based enterprises would occupy a greater share in national budgets, and second, a shift from manual to mental labor would be critical in economic productivity. Much later, in the 1990s, Machlup’s formulation resurfaced in the documents produced by international think-tanks. His argument about the role of technology as a source of economic growth particularly resonated with the international agencies and several national governments. OECD re-launched the concept of knowledge economy in its policy reports in the 1990s forging connections between advanced information, skills and growth (OECD, 1996; 1997) Even as the term was employed in almost undefined, loose ways the policy doctrines continued to use it to structure a direct and simple connection between knowledge and productivity. In a source publication in 2005, OECD defined knowledge-based economy by drawing on the mutually reinforcing relationship between scientific knowledge and productive skills. “The knowledge based economy is an expression coined to describe trends in advanced economies towards greater dependence on knowledge, information and high skill levels, and the increasing need for ready access to all of these by the business and public sectors” (OECD, 2005). The trends involving greater dependence on “knowledge, information and high skills”, as the OECD report describes, are produced within the material conditions that enable the fast-paced, productive skills. Thus, knowledge is not only explicitly tied to economic productivity, but it is a product in itself. The knowledge referred here is highly codified and hence easily transferable. In order to acquire the new knowledge, a number of changes are proposed in education, particularly the investments in higher education sector are promoted on the grounds that research and development (R & D) can easily lend itself to commercial industry.
The Third World Needs Knowledge

In many post-colonial countries, the World Bank and other international agencies began promoting knowledge-based development. World Bank, in particular was set to make a mark for itself as “knowledge bank” by privileging the ‘weightless’ economy and initiating a range of projects in the developing world. Thus, ‘Knowledge Economy Paradigm’ became an important aspect of the ‘leapfrogging’ model that was specifically targeted at developing countries. Leapfrogging suggested that by incorporating knowledge industry the developing nations would be able to accelerate economic reforms. By prioritizing knowledge-industries, the developing countries could vault over the stages of establishing expensive, traditional heavy industries and move directly towards advanced industrial phases. Since 1998, the Bank is involved in Knowledge for Development (K4D) focusing on helping the client countries transition to knowledge economy by strengthening the following ‘four pillars’: economic and institutional regime, education, innovation, and Information and Communication Technologies (World Bank, 2007). Basic and adult literacy, development of ICT, technology transfer and science-based policy are some of the highlights of K4D practice in developing countries. By employing eighty three structural and qualitative variables, the World Bank has developed its own methodology to evaluate a country’s performance in knowledge economy. Education for Knowledge Economy (EKE) is another project initiated by the World Bank that aims at developing countries equip themselves with the highly skilled and flexible human capital needed to compete effectively in today’s dynamic global markets. Such assistance recognizes, first and foremost, that the ability to produce and use knowledge has become a major factor in development and is critical to a nation’s comparative advantage. (World Bank, 2006).
Three broad reform strategies are proposed to build knowledge economy in developing countries. First, expansion and reorientation of education system in order to impart higher-level skills to new generation as well as train and retrain existing labor force. Second, creation of national innovation network comprising of “firms, research centers, universities, and think tanks that work together to take advantage of the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilate and adapt it to local needs, and create new technology”. Finally, a rearticulation is proposed of the state’s role as the sole provider of education. The rearticulation here points at the changing logic of governance and redefinition of the role of the State in learning economy. In this case, the state is not expected to opt out of in favor of private interests but it is expected to create building blocks and 'enabling framework' by harnessing scientific research, entrepreneurship and conditions favorable to business. In his discussion of the World Bank’s vision of knowledge-driven development, Stiglitz clearly lays out the expected role of the state. “There is no prescription for how a corporation can create such a culture. But government does have a role - a role in education, in encouraging the kind of creativity and risk taking that the scientific entrepreneurship requires, in creating the institutions that facilitate ideas being brought into fruition, and a regulatory and tax environment that rewards this kind of activity.” (Stiglitz, 2002:3).

World Bank’s initiatives in knowledge-intensive development are met with criticisms on several grounds. The premise of new development goals for the third world and Bank’s hierarchical structures are among them. As for the specifics, ‘Knowledge for Development’ and ‘Education for Knowledge Economy’ both promote a uniform vision of knowledge, sidestepping particularities, local histories, contestations and contradictions in it.” The word “knowledge,” coded as open and accessible to all, has come to stand in for expert knowledge
or expertise directly connected to high-tech, and distant from more equitable visions of knowledge. Competing conceptualizations of “local knowledge” for fueling development were never legitimated or institutionalized among the international development community as appropriate drivers of the new global economy.” (Radhakrishnan, 2007:8). Lyla Mehta (2001) identifies three ways in which the World Bank has assumed leadership in spearheading a particular articulation of knowledge. It is useful to turn to her critique in order to situate the discourses surrounding K4D and EKE. According to Mehta, the Bank

1. Seeks to be a neutral gatekeeper of development knowledge while at the same time promoting itself as one of the producers of knowledge.

2. It presents development knowledge as something neutral and de-linked from issues of power. The Bank’s agenda also excludes dynamic aspects of knowledge. The neglect of sociocultural issues and those concerning a wider political economy has given rise to knowledge agenda that is both narrow and reductionist.

3. Its approach to knowledge is highly centralized, contradicting current understandings of the cultural nature of knowledge and the decentralized nature of information flows in informational society (Mehta, 2001: 189).

Education and Economic Reforms in India: The Role of Skilled Workforce

India’s encounter with knowledge intensive economy occurred alongside its gradual move towards economic liberalization beginning in the 1980s. India’s expansive higher education sector with employable English-speaking population and a potential for growth in information services were considered to be good entry points for embarking on information-based economy. India had long been investing in select higher education in technology and science research; and had socialized higher education at large. The information direction of the 1980s, however, occurred in order to meet the needs of emerging global information economy. As such, Indian information technology sector saw a remarkable growth in the
1990s. The software imports, for instance, increased from $52 million in 1998 to $7.7 billion in 2001 and software exports are now accounted for 14% of the total exports and 2% of the GDP (Arora & Athreye, 2002). Historical accounts of India’s scientific knowledge depict how the approaches to pursue knowledge in post-independent times were influenced by diverse forces including socialist visions, pressures from domestic capitalist class, and growing geopolitical conflicts (Tilak. 2005; Pande, Aggarwal, Dewane & Kuznetsov, 2004). India’s growth in information industries is closely connected to the larger shift in planning and policy that was markedly different in direction from previous decades. Often characterized as ‘economic nationalism’, India’s development pattern in the early years of independence involved centralized planning and strictly regulated private enterprise. The policy was influenced by Nehruvian socialism that identified the state to be the controller of economy with centralized planning as a crucial part of development. Accordingly the state enforced restrictions on “private investments, capital issues and foreign collaborations as well as imports of technology, capital goods, and intermediate inputs” (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003:13). Like many newly independent countries of the 1950s and 60s, India supported an inward-looking model of import substitution that reserved basic and heavy industries for the public sector and sought to minimize imports in order to encourage indigenous production and businesses. Science and technology development was supported the same way, keeping in mind the national good. Thus, first twenty-five years of independence included development of domestic computer technology, launch of the national satellite technology, nation’s first computer network and the first nuclear explosion. Following the establishment of National Informatics Centre (NIC), a number of Indian companies like Wipro, Infosys, Patni and TCS became active in electronics and information
technology. It was in the 1970s during Indira Gandhi’s administration that the centralized techno-nationalism was reassessed in favor of incorporating the logic of market. This was further echoed by India’s urban middle class in its growing criticism of the State for being heavily bureaucratic and inefficient. Gradual deregulation of the communication sector was introduced amidst these political forces.

Indira Gandhi’s administration set out to mobilize the support of the rising middle classes by expanding the communications sectors and reversing its previous policies of import restrictions. The state expanded the national television network, increased imports of consumer electronic goods like television and audio equipment, deregulated the advertising industry and allowed for the expansion of “luxury” consumer goods from processed foods, and soft drinks to beauty products. (Chakravorty, 2004: 236).

The next administration, headed by Rajiv Gandhi continued the reversal of import-restriction policies, leading to a massive increase in imports. However, a lack of comparative increase in exports ultimately led to a trade deficit. Under pressures from international agencies, foreign and domestic capitalist classes and international governments, India began opening its markets and public sector for foreign investments. The initial steps for liberalizing telecommunications were taken in the late 1980s when postal and telecommunication sector previously under the monopoly of central government was split into two separate ministries, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the Ministry of Communications. Diasporan entrepreneurs like Sam Pitroda played an important role in making a case for the overhaul of national communications policy. National Telecom Policy (NTP) of 1994 allowed the Department of Telecommunications to accord licenses to private companies. Mid 1990s was also the time when the Internet was beginning to be made available commercially. Expansion of communications sector made way for the ensuing developments in information technology.
The use of Knowledge economy to drive development first found space in India’s policy doctrine in the late 1990s, after the release of two Information Technology Action Plans in 1998. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology developed the Project on ‘National Competitiveness in Knowledge Economy’ that focused on new knowledge and took up active interest in setting up policy. [http://www.knowledge-economy.in/Others/AboutCMIT.sp] IT-enabled services received tax reduction and they were integrated into professional branches of higher education with an emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation. Additionally, efforts to mainstream information-services were carried out by introducing rural data processing centers, computer literacy programs and initiatives of e-governance. The institutional setup for training technical professionals in information technology had been created in 1988 with the formation of National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASCOM) that was set up “to facilitate business and trade in software and services and to encourage advancement of research in software technology.” (Ahuja, 2000).

Policy Shifts in K-12 Education: Understanding Connections

The history of policy shifts in K-12 education in post-independence India illustrates a shift in the ideas about public nature of resources, basic rights and the degree of state-provision in services. The newly independent state viewed education as an essential tool to the efforts of nation building. The first education commission of independent India declared that the real task ahead was “to create, not a lesser England but a greater India” (Naik, 1971/1997). Creating opportunities for education was given importance, in the hope that education will be instrumental in equalizing a population segregated along the lines of caste,
class and gender. Establishing a growing network of state-run schools (known as “municipal/government schools”), the state promised “free and compulsory education for all children” (Government of India, 1955). Partially state-funded schools and a few private schools were also introduced, although the affordability of government schools was crucial in opening up participatory spaces for disadvantaged communities. As government schools began acquiring large mass-base in the first two decades of independence, the bourgeoisie participation and engagement with these schools reduced considerably. Infrastructural improvements and accountability pressures on government schools took a steady decline, and as a result, severely inadequate government schools became the only recourse available for the disadvantaged communities (Majumdar, 2004). Lack of access to quality education, lower enrollment ratios and high dropout rates are some of the most visible features of the deep structural inequalities that exist in the Indian education system.

The policy language of K-12 education began to change in the late-1980s. The National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1986, for instance, did share the goals of previous policy positions such as the commitment to common school system (CSS) and quality improvement in government schools, but it was amended in 1992 in order to open up the sector to the private, non-state actors. This was in part due the larger economic policy shift in the 1990s toward liberalization that emerged out of a fiscal and foreign exchange crisis. The economic reforms dismantled the complex licensing system and introduced privatization in nationally controlled services. External components of liberalization included an active encouragement of foreign direct investment among other measures. The reforms were accompanied by structural adjustment policies as well as macroeconomic stabilization. Following the introduction of structural adjustment policies, state investment in social
sectors dropped down. In order to offset the adverse impacts, the World Bank initiated social safety net measures one of which was the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), a scheme of external assistance in elementary education. Started in 1994, the first phase of DPEP covered 42 districts in seven states. With assistance from other international agencies including UNDP, DFID, UNICEF and SIDA, the program later expanded to 270 districts in 18 states. Promising to facilitate Universal Elementary Education (UEE) and Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL), DPEP became the largest externally aided program in the developing world (Rani, 2003; Kumar et al., 2001). The International Development Agency of the World Bank funded $269 million and $425 million for phases I and II of the program while the ODA extended $80 million. DPEP officials were responsible for planning and administration of elementary education, curriculum design, teacher education and infrastructural support. Some of the important features of DPEP interventions in India include the emphasis on decentralization, cost-management and private actors in primary education. With DPEP began a process of restructuring in primary education that continues till date. By the year 2000, a new ‘global consensus’ emerged in the international development arena that identified a set of targets. The target-based approach to development, also known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) involved universal primary education and removal of gender disparities in schooling among other issues. The DPEP and MDG-initiated development visions of primary education made it possible for non-governmental organizations, volunteer and community groups and other non-state organizations to participate in a number of ways. It is this particular policy context in which transnational networks have become active.
Diaspora, Education and Action

This chapter brings together multiple strands that have informed and shaped the current practices in education advocacy, action and organization. Examining the historical context of policy changes in Indian education, the larger changes in economic orientation become important considerations. The production of transnational, skilled workforce is closely connected to the reforms in Indian higher education over the past few decades. The transnational networks in education continue to identify Indian primary education to be an important site to engage with and participate.

The three transnational organizations studied for this dissertation have their own, distinct ideas about the kinds of reforms Indian education needs and they have organized their actions in a number of different ways. What binds them all together, however, is the diasporic social action space that has evolved over the past two decades. Conversations and social actions in education and economy that happened in the exclusively national context, now involve transnational, diasporic, non-governmental and civic organizations, small and large as active interlocutors. The large body of transnational networks figures prominently in the contemporary global field where states are experiencing policy pressures from multiple actors. The policy changes in education, for instance, are driven by the need to attract multinational capital often at the expense of domestic education policy. Diasporic social organizations have entered the conversation about Indian education at a critical juncture that has redefined the direction of education. Knowledge economy in its various forms is crucial in thinking about diasporic engagement in India’s education. I continue to the conversation about diaspora and the state in the next chapter that pays attention to the particularities of
Indian diaspora, especially how the ideologies of class, caste and citizenship interact with the formation of diaspora.
Chapter 3

Education and the Production of the ‘NRI’

The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. Castells, 2004:7

The colours of our passports are different; the religions we profess are not the same; our mother tongues vary; and the regions from which our ancestors came are far apart, but “Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani”

1
Address to diaspora, 2003
Mr Yashwant Sinha, Minister for External Affairs of India (2000-04)

Model Minority Spectacles and Working Class Struggles

After being appointed on President Obama’s transition team in November 2008, Sonal Shah, the former head of Google's global development wing was selected to lead the office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation. Shah was a familiar name to those following Indian/Indian-American electronic media, especially after she became the ‘India Abroad Person of the Year’in 2003 for her work with Indicorps and Ekal Vidyalaya(one-teacher schools) Foundation. Indicorps organizes a volunteer-based exchange program that connects Indian diasporan youth with several NGOs working in India. Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation raises funds to support non-formal and early education centers in the adivasi regions of India. Receiving her honor in the presence of dignitaries like the Indian Minister

1Translation: ‘Yet (our) heart is Indian’.
2In November 2008 Shah was appointed on Obama-Biden transition team that led to protest from progressive South Asians as well as the Christian Right owing to her association with Vishwa Hindu Parishad America (VHPA- The World Hindu Council of America), a fund raising arm of the Hindu Right. Shah was called out on her silence over the systematic attacks on minority populations in India by Hindu right wing organizations.
of External Affairs, India’s ambassador to the United States, and leaders of the Democratic Party, Shah talked about her work. “We envisioned an organisation that holistically empowered individuals by reconnecting them to their roots...We want to show that aside from being a financially successful Diaspora -- that we as Indian-Americans are making a larger contribution to the world...One person can make a difference. I urge you to come join us in service -- in your neighbourhoods, your communities, your nation.”(Rediff India Abroad, 2003). Shah became the latest icon of successful Indians abroad and the transnational social actions of her organizations received much ink and applause. Her story involved the familiar motifs of Indian pride, cultural nationalism and ‘making it’ in the Mecca of capitalism.

The media spectacle surrounding Sonal Shah, however, buried several other stories of diasporan Indians who were negotiating the classed, racialized and gendered spaces of alienation in the United States. One such story included the struggle mounted by Indian dockyard workers. Following hurricane Katrina, hundreds of laborers from India were brought in to work on the reconstruction sites in Mississippi and Texas by Signal International, a marine corporation. Hired on a 10-month H2B visas the workers were “confined in a labor camp, housed 24 people to a trailer, forced to pay over $1000 a month for their housing and food, threatened with deportation if they complained, and had their legal documents withheld from them.”(Mathiowetz, 2008). On March 6, 2008, approximately one hundred guest workers walked off their jobs and organized a direct action to protest against the inhuman working conditions they described as ‘modern day slavery’. They organized a ‘journey of justice’ from New Orleans to Washington D.C. Incidentally, neither the office of Indian embassy nor the department of justice had anything concrete to offer. Continuing the struggle,
the workers formed an organizational front entitled Indian Workers’ Congress (IWC) and organized a 29-day long hunger strike protesting the treatment by the Department of Justice. “… Our lives are on hold. We are paralysed”, reads the IWC statement as they neared their strike. “We live in constant terror of deportation. We cannot work. We cannot see our families. We cannot provide for our families. We are listening to our children grow up over long distance phone calls. We have not been able to attend the funerals of our mothers and fathers in India.” (New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice, 2008). The story of Indian workers in New Orleans was never picked up by the diasporic media. Both the ‘model minority’ discourse in the U.S. and the ‘successful NRI’ discourse in India have been incapable of recognizing the fractures and fragments that make up Indian diaspora.

The dramatic contrast between the two cases foregrounds different realities and contestations of South Asian diasporic experience. It also highlights the uneven material landscape on which different diasporic groups engage in articulating their political actions. As transnational corporations feed on the free, flexible labor drawn from the peripheral third world, oftentimes interesting alliances are formed between the nation and diaspora in service of the transnational capital. Migrations, displacements, transitions and de/re-territorialization produce class, caste, race, sexuality and gender politics at the local, national and transnational levels. As such, crossing borders, possessing capital and making effective alliances with positions of power has been made easier for some people. Movements, circulations and transactions across various zones and in different social currencies occur along side the deeply-entrenched discourses such as American dream, Indian success and transnational nationalism (Grewal, 1999).
Picking the thread of ‘diaspora option’ from last chapter, I employ closer readings of the political revival of Indian diaspora. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of diaspora. I provide a historical context to understand how India’s flexible citizens, the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) entered the Indian policy realms. I draw on interdisciplinary scholarship in order to situate the recent reincarnation of NRI subjects. A growing participation of NRIs in India’s evolving policy and cultural texts is orchestrated along caste-class lines and the ‘idea’ of entrepreneurial diasporic subject is used as a disciplining tool by the Indian state (Mani & Varadarajan, 2005). Having their symbolic and material assets in place, the capital-friendly diasporic subjects are re-nationalized as valuable members of the Indian State. While the role of diasporas in Indian economic development is well documented (Dossani, 2008; Kapoor, 2004; Saxenian, 2002), it is also important to understand the politics of diasporan visibility and influence. My foremost intention in this dissertation is to theorize the diasporic educational action space and its relationship with the Indian State. This chapter focuses on some of the pertinent issues about Indian diaspora by drawing on diaspora studies, international migration and India’s policy shift. The narratives of migration from India to the various parts of the world are connected to various complex historical and social forces; so are the desi immigrant experiences. The post-1960s skilled migration from India to the United States is one of the most dominant migrant narratives of recent times. I revisit the larger context of such migrations in order to better understand the educational advocacy networks that I study in this research project. Over the past few years the Indian state has consistently been reaching out diaspora networks and encouraging their transnational actions. Whether it is through technology transfer initiatives or institutionalizing ‘Pravasi Bhartiya Divas’ (PBD/Overseas Indian Day), the
skilled diasporas have become part of new economic plans and development for the nation. These broader changes are important to locate the tenor of ideological and financial groundwork in organizing transnational educational actions. This chapter is organized as follows: A review of mobility and diaspora formation is presented in the beginning, paying attention to the metaphors such as home/outside, core/periphery and the role(s) of memory, place and imagination in shaping up everyday diasporan practices. The next section carries out a brief account of the formation of Indian diasporic sense in the U.S. Documenting the changes in India’s relationship with its migrants, the following two sections demonstrate how Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) have become part of India’s development projects.

**Mobility, Diasporas, Networks**

Theories of diaspora formation are closely linked to the variegated histories of migration, displacement, travels and transitions. The intellectual space of diaspora studies in social sciences and humanities was considered ‘the paradigmatic other’ in the context of traditions that theorized mobility within primarily an economic orientation. Neoclassical theory, dual-economy models and Marxist models have paid attention to the larger socioeconomic contexts and drivers of migration. Rational choice of individuals and their volitions were defining aspects of neoclassicial theoretical approaches whereas the Marxist models situated migration in relation to class-assertions, wage-differentials and shifts from agriculture to industrial model of economic organization. Mobility also figures prominently in the narratives of slavery, colonialism, and industrial development. In the various stages of capitalist expansion, the flexible and alienated labor came to be linked to capital in mobility. In recent times, the scholarship in social sciences and humanities turned to diaspora in order
to theorize the newly emerging cultural spaces. Different intellectual traditions ranging from the British school of cultural studies to third world feminisms, and from transnational social movements to migrant labor activism have found diaspora to be a useful concept to make sense of the multiple possibilities of belonging, new ways of thinking about the state and transcending it through social practices that are increasingly defined by modernity and globalization (Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Gopinath, 2005). The concept of diaspora also necessitated a rethinking of citizenship, community and identity, particularly in ways that sought to explore the relationship between places, memory, travels and affect. Metaphors of departure, exile and return underscore the experiential and liminal aspects of diasporan identity. Stuart Hall’s famous exposition on diaspora and culture, for instance, eloquently addresses the changing significance of place amidst departures. “To return to the Caribbean after any long absence is to experience again the shock of the ‘doubleness’ of similarity and difference” (Hall, 1990). The ‘doubleness’, Hall asserts, is central to the narratives of migration, place and allegiance. It also points out the complex connections involving constructs such as place, collective memory and identification that together create a sense of origin, authenticity and culture. Bhabha’s formulation of the ‘third space’ shows the limits of an exclusively place-bound understanding of cultures in motion. The third space is neither an extension nor a constituent of the original; it rather enables the original to emerge. (Bhabha, 1990:211).

Metaphors of home/outside, core/periphery, origin/ imitation often depict the type of kinship between the nation and its diaspora. Despite the implicit co-dependence between the two, the ‘outside’ can potentially be an escape from and a critique of the normative ‘home’. Placed on the margins of the normative, diaspora can disrupt the notions of authenticity,
purity and cultural absolutism that are at the heart of many nationalist projects (Brubaker, 2005; Bhatt and Mukta, 2000; Gopinath, 2005). Diasporan practices however engage in attempts to forge a continuity with places and markers that are ‘left behind’ through employing imagination. Arjun Appadurai argues that the work of imagination is shaped through certain forms of mass mediation and plays a key role in the formation of post-national public sphere. “…as mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and such mass media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres.” (Appadurai, 1996:22). The semiotics of imagination captures both, the alienation and attachment of migrant experience, as it breaks open the tension between psychological distancing and imaginative propinquity between diaspora and the nation. Through their liminal and material practices diasporas often re-organize the national in transnational spaces. Resource mobilization for communities back home becomes an important aspect of transnational networks that also engage in information dissemination, advocacy, cultural collaboration and lobbying. Transnational ‘information communes’ have managed to make use of the information to connect, collaborate and forge a range of possible relationships with the state. Thus, information has become a crucial resource, tool and commodity around which a host of networks have developed. These include networks that seek support to reassert their national ties and also those who launch counter-nationalism or secessionist mobilization. 

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3 The ordeals of border crossing, back-breaking work and re-generation of ties to the hometown are some of the recurring conversations in Alex Rivera’s documentary “The Sixth Section”. Grupo Union, the diasporic network of Mexican families working in low-income jobs in New York decide to set aside some
The emergence and significance of transnational activities have, by now, become a characteristic feature of immigrant social organizing. The interdisciplinary scholarship concerned with issues as distinct as globalization, social change, new media and youth studies have paid attention to diasporic social practices in order to probe into the workings of global modernity. Much research has also focused on the ways in which the progressive decentering of capitalism led to a reorganization of national systems of production in accordance with globalized circuits of accumulation and consumption. The global process of selective and asymmetrical integration of science, technology and finance has led to large-scale institutional changes (Castells, 2006; Ong & Nonini, 1997; Vertovec, 2004). As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in the flow of information, people and capital across national borders. Under the new global economic paradigm, the development of communication technologies as well as transborder flows of labor—both skilled and unskilled—have been driving forces for the formation of transnational networks. Deregulation, liberalization and privatization have been the basis of institutional responses to global business expansion. Economically mobile populations are increasingly seen as possessors of key social and economic resources for their countries of origin. Governments have taken up special steps to facilitate transnational actions in order to attract remittances and investments from the expatriates. Growth in advanced information technologies and global media businesses have led to an unparallel instance of production, distribution and

money for the essential services in their town in Mexico. In their social interactions, cultural practices and fundraising endeavors they begin to give expression to their migrant experiences, economic disparities and the conditions that made them a part of the flexible-labor induced migration and living.
sharing of images and texts. Innovations in communications technology have also enabled sustained collaborations outside the purview of national borders.

India Meets America

The long and turbulent history of mobility in South Asia is connected to the history of colonialism, flexible labor as well as the workings of late capitalism. The large-scale movements of people that began in the late 17th century to regions as distinct as Trinidad, East Africa, Mauritius and North America point out the prowess of colonial capitalism on the one hand and the centrality of cultural rituals and social networks in the formation of diasporic communities on the other. Scholars have situated the formation of Indian diaspora within the two historical moments, mentioned above. (Mishra, 1997; Visweswaran, 1997) The ‘second wave’ of South Asian migration to United States occurred after 1960. After forty-years of restrictive immigration policies, the Immigration & Nationality Amendment Act (1965) eliminated quotas based on ‘national origins’ and as a result, the immigration from Asia began to grow. The revised immigration act of 1965 set out to impact international migration in two major ways: Sponsorship-based “chain migration” became prevalent due to the criterion of family cohesion, and the U.S. became one of the major destinations for semi-skilled and skilled professionals from the developing world. A total of

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In the US the migrant labor from South Asia was historically concentrated in California’s rice cultivation before moving into railroad works, lumber mills and farming. By the end of 19th century the recruitment of Asian workforce and the stringent measures of immigration control had become signature labor patterns. For instance, following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Japanese workers were hired in place of the Chinese labor until they were prohibited from the workforce by the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1907. South Asian immigrants especially from Punjab were the prominent sources of farm labor during this time until the Asian Barred Zone statute was put in place in 1917.
7,331,500 Asian immigrants were admitted in the span of 30- years (1971-2002) with a large presence of immigrants from Vietnam (1,098,000), Philippines (1,508,100), China (1,179,300) and India (1,005,100) (Statistical Abstracts, 2003). Between 1965 and 1990, Asian immigration to the United States increased tenfold to a quarter of a million annually. In what is often called a “dramatic demographic transformation”, farm work, motel and restaurant industry and service work at grocery chains offered concrete possibilities for immigrants. The post 1965 Indian immigrant population was placed within the restaurant industry, medium enterprises and high-skilled sectors.

The dotcom boom of the late 1980s followed by Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1990 resulted in a dramatic increase of skilled migration. Further, specialty occupations visas covering priority workers, advanced degree holders and persons of exceptional ability increased significantly in the last decade. Under the temporary H1B, an initial cap of 65,000 was set for non-immigrant workers who were given visa permits for three years. Situating the temporary H1B visa provision in the context of immigration policies, Grewal (2005:5) writes, “The Indian H1B visa holder’s ability to participate in the American dream was made possible by the expansion of ‘high-tech’ jobs enabling the United States to import workers from other parts of the world, mainly India, China and Taiwan… Indian holders of H1B visas represented a group able to come to the United States because of a number of transnational discourses in which English speaking, middle and upper-class Indian immigrants were seen as highly desirable “tech workers”. Between 1990 and 2002, the numerical ceiling for H1B temporary jobs went up to 195,000 from 65000 (Portes, 2004; Chellaraj, et.al, 2004 ) whereas the employment-based visas rose to 140,000 from that of 58000 in 1976. In 2002, workers from India made up 33% of all H1Bs issued, and 63% of all
H1B visas were computer related. Anjali Sahay presents interesting facts recording the characteristics of H1B visa holders. “The typical H-1B beneficiary was: born in India, thirty years old, holding a bachelor’s degree, working in a computer-related occupation, and receiving an annual income of $53,000. In addition, 24 percent of all beneficiaries were born in India, had either a bachelor’s or master’s degree, and were employed in a computer-related occupation.” (Sahay, 2009:103).

**Non Resident Indian and the State**

According to the Ministry of external affairs, Indian diaspora constitutes over 20 million people living in over seventy five countries, making it one of the largest populations. At various points in the evolving acknowledgment of the significance of international mobility, the Indian state has referred to its diasporic population with a host of names including British Overseas Indians (BOI), Non Resident Indians (NRI), Persons of Indian Origin (PIO), Overseas-Born Indians (OBI) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI). Fashioned by the relatively young official parlance, these terms differ from each other in regards to the familial histories of migration and the citizenship of migrants. The term NRI (Non-Resident Indians) is widespread and is used generically to describe Indians living abroad. Over the last decade the State recognized the potential of Indian diaspora and through a number of initiatives proceeded to create appropriate incentives to help enhance their cultural and material ties to the region. From brain-drain-to-brain-circulation- to brain-gain, the changing metaphors for NRIs are indicative of India’s recent attempts to rearticulate its relationship with the expatriates. A monumental growth in remittance patterns is indicative of the numerous opportunities created for foreign capital to enter India. Since 1995, for instance,
cash remittances from overseas Indians have doubled, reaching to a record inflow of over $22 billion in 2005 (Sud, 2006; Patterson, 2006). NRIs, especially those settled in the industrial west and possess capital have become part of the cultural sphere in India, acquiring new meanings that have almost mythologized them. The cultural production of such desirable Indian subjects from overseas was significantly different from the commonly held understanding of Indian diaspora in previous decades. India’s political stance in the early years of independence was focused on domestic industrial development and configuring an independent geopolitical place for itself on the international front. Organization of the Asian-African conference, also known as the Bandung Conference in 1955 illustrates India’s attempts to build coalition with the newly independent nations and resist western imperialist interventions in the third world. Non-alignment was an important aspect of India’s foreign policy and in part, it steered India’s move to promote national industries and regulate foreign capital. Amidst the numerous challenges encountered in early years of independence, the Indian state found itself incapable of actively safeguarding the interests of its vast diaspora. The State’s priorities found expressions in Nehru’s speech in front of a diasporic audience in Singapore in 1946: “India cannot forget her sons and daughters overseas. Although India cannot defend her children overseas today, the time is soon coming when her arm will be long enough to protect them” (Suryanarayan, 2008). A gradual change in the policy toward diaspora began to emerge in the 1970s. As part of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, the

5 Subsequent official and popular understanding of diaspora remained squarely focused on the citizenship and resident status of the migrants whose interests were not engaged by the State. In the same vein, the large-scale skilled migration beginning 1960s was almost exclusively framed as brain-drain. The highly subsidized Indian education was not being put to use for national development, instead “it became a ticket to migrate to the industrial west” (Khardia, 1999).
term Non-Resident Indian (NRI) was first discussed in 1973 in the context of encouraging the diaspora to invest in Indian industries (Banerjea & Mukherjea, 1975). The category “NRI” would later create other markers of diasporic association and it would undergo numerous changes during India’s economic policy shift. A gradual demise of the third world as a political ideology of solidarity, ensuing fractures into the non-alignment movement and a series of geopolitical conflicts cast shadows on the subcontinental politics of the 1980s. As the state turned to economic liberalization, it also reframed the policy towards diaspora in ways to welcome the expertise and innovations by overseas Indians. Transnational affluent Indians were entrusted with the task of lobbying and representing India’s interests internationally.

Research on Indian diaspora has focused on the complex ways in which the nation is imagined, encountered and re-crafted by desi communities in different national spaces. In the efforts to stay connected to ‘home’, diasporas often reproduce the relations of power, occasionally forging new hierarchies. The desire to embrace Indianness is largely a response to anxieties of fitting in the U.S. Conversations about the circulation of people, cultures and capital between contemporary South Asia and the United States have emphasized the double-bind of model-minority stereotypes in the U.S. and dominant class-caste positions in the subcontinent that have shaped the social life of desi diaspora. (Prashad, 2000; Shukla, 2003; Biswas, 2005). Other relevant conversations include interpretations of modern South Asian transnationalism along with its ideological messages. In unearthing different strands of South Asian diasporic history, Prashad’s ‘The Karma of Brown Folk’ (2000) considers the narratives of immigrant negotiations agitations and community building. For Prashad, diasporan anxieties over race and class dominance translate into being a model minority that
ultimately serves white supremacy. Filling the blanks in Prashad’s analysis, feminist scholars of South Asian diaspora have powerfully pointed out the centrality of gender in thinking about psycho-social and political notions connected to migration and diaspora. Problematizing the normative, these scholars indicate that home is rarely a safe space for those who do not fit the normativity of gender and sexuality (Bhaskaran, 2004; Gopinath, 2005; Grewal, 2005).

This position was further articulated in the High Level Committee Report on Diaspora (2002) that opened by stating that overseas Indians are strategic assets for India’s development. The report proposed four specific measures to promote overseas participation. First, it called for setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZ) exclusively catering to NRI and PIO businesses. Second, a “single-window setup” was proposed in order to provide consultancy services and to work as a liaison toward getting fast-track clearances for proposals from overseas Indian investors. Third, it sought to establish ties with professional NRIs who could promote India as an important destination for outsourcing. And finally, the report suggested that the expertise of NRIs in managerial positions be sought to upgrade management and finance of Indian corporations. As the report presents various strands of migration from India during colonial and post-colonial times, it holds special place for skilled diasporas for “India’s resurgence as a global player and as a country of stature in the comity of nations” ("Report of the High Level Committee" vii). The provision of such spatial selection continues to affect the degrees of naturalization and the terrain of rights for members of diaspora.

The Indian state’s policy directive has found ample support among expatiate communities. This has led to an accentuation of the NRI identity and generation of diaspora
networks. In the United States for instance, the collective NRI identity has been in works for many years. The publication of *India Abroad* is often credited for consciously steering a distinct NRI identity. *India Abroad* started as an informal newsletter in 1970 and soon went on to become a facilitator between business groups, successful NRIs and the Indian State. The magazine sought to model on the wealthy Jewish lobby and actively involve in lobbying efforts. Indian diasporic politics in the U.S. is played out on various terrains and with a range of political leanings—ultra conservative, liberal, leftist, anarchist, feminist, queer, anti-imperialist to name a few. Often times these positions stand in direct conflict with each other about what counts as history, politics or facts about India. Such conflicts and the multiple truths upheld by them are critical in reminding us about the much-needed qualifiers before talking about Indian diaspora in general.

Much of the re-branding of India in transnational circles has taken place under the leadership of capital-friendly NRIs and this is not limited to business and commerce alone. NRI organizations have taken on a range of roles including lobbying, fundraising, negotiating, philanthropy and outreach among influential circuits in the U.S. In recent times, the NRIs have attempted to push for a special strategic alliance largely as a byproduct of the imperialist rhetoric such as the ‘war on terror’. The USINPAC, for instance, went as far as to state that “The terrorism directed at India is the same as terrorism directed at United States and Israel” (Assisi, 2007). The symbolic capital including education, transnational mobility, legal immigrant status and institutional access make up the social space of NRI organizations and advocacy networks. “Through their glittering academic and professional careers overseas, the diaspora opened the eyes of the West to India as a reliable destination for business process outsourcing (BPO) and for the cutting-edge phenomenon- knowledge
process outsourcing (KPO)...To quote Shashi Tharoor: 'NRI' now stands for "Never Relinquished India." Wherever it resides, thanks to these stellar deeds, a new confidence is showing in the Indian diaspora's sense as a community, manifesting itself in interest group lobbying, climbing of political ladders and Lakshmi Mittal-style conquering of global business horizons” (Overseas Indian, 2006).

**NRI & Development**

For over seven years now, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) of the Government of India hosts a three-day long celebration called ‘Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)/Overseas Indian Day’. Commemorating January 9 as the day of Gandhi’s return to India from South Africa, the occasion is marked “to connect India with its diaspora”. Inaugurating the seventh ‘Pravasi Bharatiya Divas(PBD) on January 8, 2009, the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh vouched for making the Overseas Citizenship Cards available that would facilitate life-long visa and certain economic and educational benefits. Referring to the diasporas as “powerful agents of social and economic change”, the Prime Minister called upon them to participate in India’s development “within the framework of a free and open society and an open economy” (Ministry of Overseas Affairs, 2009; Rediff IndiaAbroad, 2009). The PM was presenting a progression of the narrative that began in 2002 that was wrapped in overt economic and cultural overtones. In the first meet with diasporic representatives, the then Prime Minister Vajpayee had invoked the imagery of global Indian family reunion. At the grand event of PBD, successful diasporic Indians are celebrated and honored; it is also an occasion where state governments offer attractive business incentives to diaspora. The yearly gatherings of PBD have included elements of cultural tourism, business
networking opportunities and a powerful symbolism that has crafted a new image of India that is eager to consumption, business and regional leadership. While specific messages of PBD differ, the implicit invitation for diaspora to participate in India’s economic and social life is a common running thread. Dr. Singh’s inaugural speech in 2005, for instance, made an overt plea for investments: “...Your impatience at our bureaucratic ways is understandable…India needs US $150 billion in investment in its infrastructure and investment by dual Indian citizens could help fulfill that need…We are committed to make it attractive for you to invest in India...” (Indian Express, 2005). The scenario had changed by 2009 when the elated Prime Minister declared, “A few months ago the international community lifted restrictions to end our nuclear isolation of the last thirty four years. The overseas Indian community, specially in the United States, played a key role in ensuring this outcome and in mobilizing congressional support for it in the United States. For this we are truly grateful to all of you. But much more importantly, this is a sign of the growing role that Indian origin communities are now playing in public policy and opinion making across the world. We applaud you for that contribution” (India Embassy, 2009). While Dr. Singh’s speech reinforces the policy role assumed by a select NRI networks, it clearly indicates the NRI support for India’s geopolitical ambitions.

The evolving relationship between the Indian state and its diaspora manifested in PBD brings to bear the ways in which public resources are utilized in service of transnational business and capital. Similarly, the recurring imagery including “Gandhi’s return to his motherland”, “mother India and her children” and “the global Indian family”, also plays a vital role in articulating the desired relationship between the nationand its migrants. The alliance between the Indian State and transnational capital “is visible primarily through the
consistent deployment of a nationalist rhetoric that emphasizes the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the postcolonial Indian state.” (Mani & Varadarajan, 2005: 56). Thus, the annual Pravasi Bhartiya Divas meet serves as an incredibly powerful disciplinary theatre for the public. In effect, the spectacle of PBD is also for ordinary Indians to come to terms with the consequences of various forms of migration. The showcasing and celebration of successful NRIs in 2005, for instance, coincided with the State’s brutal assault on slum inhabitants of Mumbai, who happened to be migrants in the city. Deeply disturbing as it is, the irony in this case throws away the notion of resident citizens’ rights and signals a spatial shift underway in Mumbai. Like most urban places in the third world, the metropolis of Mumbai had been home to the poor until the neoliberal economic imperatives turned it over to the business and builder lobby.

The symbolic reinscription of the NRI onto India’s national domain points out the power of places with capital and skills; it also shows permeability of national borders. The possibility of post-national affiliation is accorded to transnational elite by the State that often silences dissent in the name of ‘threat to national security’. The glossy, desirable image of an NRI is produced, in part, by obscuring the systemic inequalities and oppressions that have become part of Indian common sense. “What of all those who do not fit into the mythologised view of the NRI?”, asks Pablo Das,

What of the many millions of Indians or persons of Indian origin overseas who are not doctors or academics or software engineers? There are indeed a far greater proportion of NRIs and PIOs who are descendents of indentured labourers in the Caribbean or South-east Asia, or who live and work in West Asia/Middle East as wage labourers, trades people and domestic help, and many others who do not conform to the ‘success story’ or ‘model minority’ view of South Asian emigration and resettlement. (Das, 2008).
The ‘Solution’ Space: Diaspora and Education

“How does it feel to be a solution?” asks Vijay Prashad (2000) in his analysis of the rise of Asian-America and the model minority space. For South Asians, in particular, “what does it mean to be making a claim to a great destiny when we are ourselves only a product of state engineering through immigration controls and of the beneficence of more socialized systems of education in South Asia?” The solution-space is an interesting notion to unpack the work of diasporic social action groups that now engage with their home-bases as experts, managers and drivers of economic and ideological solutions.

During my field work for this project, I had a chance to discuss the contours of this space with members of Asha for Education. I sat down with four active members of Asha who told me about their personal journey with the organization, Asha’s recent projects and their conviction about the kinds of changes needed in India’s education policy. Our conversation soon veered into the murkier issues concerning privilege, solidarity and the conceptions of social change. Suneeth, a long time member thought that some of Asha’s decisions were “narrow” in their focus and went on present his informal analysis by relating the class position of Asha members to the organization’s overall outlook. “Most of our members come from the standard assembly lines of IIT/IIM. So there are those in-built ideas of meritocracy. Such views have helped Asha take the direction it has taken over the years” Suneeth’s candid observations are of relevance in thinking about not just Asha for Education, but the NRI advocacy spaces in general. His reference to IITs and IIMs is a code for skilled transnational workforce that can cross borders, circulate money, and assume leadership. Education is the most salient marker of new international migrants and higher education/professional training has been instrumental in the relative affluent status of Indian
diaspora in the U.S. It is through the domains such as technology transfer and managerial education that the NRI subjects have reappeared on the Indian policy space. As such, the overseas advocacy networks are overwhelmingly built around developmental issues involving education and often support the ‘solutions’ proposed by the State and international agencies.

There are a number of ways in which the relationship between Indian diaspora and the State has taken a definitive turn. Long distances do not keep the affluent members of diaspora from accessing the Indian State. The NRIs are brought back in the national fold as agents of economic change and members of the global Indian union; and they function as mediators, representatives and lobbyist for India in the international realm. This chapter touches upon some of the debates that capture the circuitous relationship between the national and transnational. The chapter picks up on some of the themes from last chapter, namely the relevance of skilled transnational individuals for national development, and presents a reading of Indian policy, and desi transnationalism.
Chapter 4

Methodological Considerations

...policies are both systems of values and symbolic systems; ways of representing, accounting for and legitimating political decisions. Policies are articulated both to achieve material effects and to manufacture support for these effects. (Ball, 1998:124)

Sites of Diasporic Actions

As I peruse through the datasets of diasporic organizations, I am struck by the multiple levels of coordination that goes into the making of transnational actions. Volunteers, members, paid staff and interns are connected through online and offline circuits. While the scopes and strengths of the groups vary, there are however, a number of common elements: web presence for the dissemination of information and acquiring donations. Email listservs for intra-group coordination and discussion. Offline and online meetings for planning and strategies. I attend a fundraising event on the eve of Indian Independence Day. Amidst an obvious nationalist imagery, the organizers discuss their organization. The emphasis is on the progress India has achieved in science and technology over the past six decades and how access to education is most crucial if India were to accelerate the progress. The symbolism and logic for aid made me think about the specificity through which India can be understood and represented by skilled diaspora. It renewed my curiosity about the role of diaspora in constructing cultural representations of India. (my filed notes)

Scattered and unorganized, these observations from the early stages of data collection provide a glimpse of the wide terrain of interesting themes that go into the making of diasporic social space of action. The alliance of class-caste-capital in shaping the ideas of education-action networks, the meaning of overtly nationalized imagery and the cultural-communicative mechanisms within diasporic groups were some of the issues that surfaced prominently in my observation-participation work. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological considerations that shape my project.

The networked actions of Indian diasporic groups have been most visible in the last two decades. As discussed in Chapter 1, these can be loosely grouped into the following types: (a) professional and travel networks, (b) linguistic/cultural networks, (c) business networks, (d) aid-based social issues networks, and (e) progressive political networks. The
ever-increasing numbers of desi diasporic groups in the U.S. highlight the growth of migration as well as the evolving spaces for migrants. The expansion of communications sector in India beginning 1980s and the availability of commercial Internet in the late 1990s helped enhance the flow of information and better equipped the newly arriving migrants. It was no surprise, then, that when I arrived in the U.S. in 2002, I had browsed the websites of some of the Indian student groups in Urbana Champaign including Asha for Education and Indian Students Association. In my first week, I learned about a dozen South Asian groups on campus. Social networking sites, live-blogging and email listservs proved invaluable resources of information and connection, making it easier to break the initial isolation for first-time migrants like myself. Internet became a useful resource through which I found myself transitioning from a fresh-off-the boat migrant to a member of desi diaspora. Through online and off-line information networks, I became connected to, what Manuel Castells often terms as ‘oppositional’ networks (Castells, 2000). Ongoing transnational solidarity campaigns such as ‘Justice for Bhopal’ (http://www.icjb.org/), ‘Friends of River Narmada’ (http://www.narmada.org/), and ‘Campaign against Coca-Cola’ (http://www.indiaresource.org/campaigns/coke/index.html), were some of these groups that not only helped me stay connected with the issues of my interest, but they also pushed me to think about the transnational space of action and its connection to the ‘struggles on ground’ in India. At first, I began to follow these successful campaigns with a bit of skepticism and bias. I was convinced that organizing for social justice from afar was much easier (and hence less significant), since it involved much less retaliation from authorities. Luckily, it was the progressive student and community activism in the U.S. that educated me about the history of radical transnationalism, the place of solidarity, and the role of critique rooted in empathy.
As for progressive South Asian politics in the U.S., I found a number of inspiring groups including, but not limited to, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), New Orleans Center for Racial Justice, South Asia Citizen’s Wire (SACW), and the Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (CSFH) that have engaged in solidarity building and voicing inconvenient truths.6

The purpose of narrating my personal experience as an immigrant student in the United States is in part to provide a context in which my role(s) as both researcher and a member of diaspora, and my politics connect with this research project. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological formulations for my project. In particular, I focus on the complexity involved in researching organizations, understanding the relationship between organizations and individuals associated with them, and working through a research problematic that includes both real and virtual sites. In devising this project, I was driven by the desire to engage with an aspect of Indian diasporic social world that is mostly untouched. I wanted to know how education became the principle area of engagement for diasporic organizations and why certain educational projects become prominent. I wanted to go beyond the statistical depictions of the exchange flows from diaspora and understand the larger logic behind their practices. After preparing a database of all the organizations engaged in transnational educational aid/advocacy, I began paying attention to the nature and degrees of transnational collaboration. Based on the issues supported by the diasporic groups, their networks and organizing practices, I decided to focus on three organizations.

Questions of Epistemology

My interests in India’s education policy discourse as well as the skilled diaspora shaped my initial questions: How do we understand a higher proportion of organizations active in education? What are the ways in which the diasporic groups are connecting to the several education networks in India? What do they bring to the debates on education? These questions were augmented, changed and broken down into several questions as I began my data collection. The visibility of NRI groups in India’s policy literature and popular sphere provides a good start to map out the policy shifts in recent years. The shift in Indian education policy, for instance, is not limited to the content of policy alone; the surge in small and big actors in education, working within the frameworks of NGOs and community groups highlights the dynamics at work in recent years.

This project emerges out of an epistemology that favors self-critical inquiry over positivism. In particular, my commitment is to criticality and intersectionality. The critical approach is present in the narration of reality, formation of questions, ideological positions of the researcher and the relationship between researcher and the researched. Given that the endeavors of social analysis are embedded in certain assumptions about what counts as relevant knowledge as well as a set of moral beliefs about studying the questions at hand, all processes of inquiry privilege particular ways of knowing and analyzing the world. In this case, therefore, the position of the researcher and her analysis is not assumed to be objective. This project holds that in order to fully understand a particular educational initiative, it is imperative that it needs to be situated within the larger political, economic, cultural and social contexts. Looking at transnational social networks, their membership, specific educational projects and the practices of engaging in a diasporic advocacy space, I pay
attention to the construction, negotiation and reproduction of ideologies of these actors, keeping in mind the multiple subjectivities that shape these networks. This means that the social phenomena in question have multiple, conflicting, even contrasting messages, values and ideologies.

Considerable focus is given in this project to exploring how official knowledge is reproduced and legitimated. It is in this respect that a working analysis of the relationship between language, the construction of reality and social practices becomes important. Social construction of policy knowledge and its translation into practices underscore the following points. First, multiple forms of valid knowledges are possible. Second, social practices are meaning-making endeavors, and meanings do not exist outside of their particular social universe (Hollis, 1992; Glassan and Lalik, 1993). I pay careful attention to the ways in which a particular language is used to create messages and descriptions about education in India, leading up to the justification of a particular kind of reform and actions. Several terms including development, access, community empowerment, and participation occur frequently in my data. These terms are connected to different historical moments in the progression of development policy in post-independent India. Similarly, multilateral and bilateral agencies, northern and southern NGOs, national governments, social action groups, and grassroots groups continue to use these terms on a regular basis. Given that the vocabulary of social action is produced, reproduced and appropriated in the context of its social currency, it is important to examine both the overt meanings and their covert signification. The phenomenon of ‘aid for education’, for instance, is produced in a particular political, economic and social context that enables connections, collaborations and participation of expatriates with their home base. To understand the nature of "long distance national
development” in this case, would be to look at how the nationalist imagery is negotiated and re-produced, outside of national borders, by people whose interactions with each other are heavily mediated by electronic media.

**Position of the Researcher**

The formation of NRI groups that are involved in fundraising has been described as ‘digital activism’, ‘long distance nationalism’ and ‘cataclysm of Indian development’. Throughout this project, I have often thought about my role as researcher in the context of the boundaries of insider/outsider. I am an ‘insider’ in that I grew up in India in the 1980s and early 1990s, had a state-subsidized education, and like most I became devastated every time the Indian cricket team took a beating. Yet, I am also an ‘outsider’ as far as these organizations are concerned, given that I have not been a member of any of the three groups I studied, and my politics differ from theirs. My political differences with the three organizations gave me an opportunity to think about the role of ideology, position of the researcher and intersubjectivity in producing research. I struggled to make sense of the disagreements and tensions and began to understand them better. Fortunately for me, the ‘researched’ were not individuals, neither was it a community in the traditional anthropological sense. The absence of ‘personal voice’ and agency involved in organizations allowed me to concentrate on publicly accessible information provided by the three groups. This ‘distance’ helped me construct my initial critical impressions that I used in my interviews in later stages. Throughout the project I kept in mind that the views of an organization may not necessarily correspond entirely with its members. While the websites, publicity materials and online forums gave me important information about the
organizations, interactions with members led me to understand the complex layers of ideology, identity-formation and transnational nationalism.

It is important to note here that while my politics do frame the research problem, it does not serve as an explanatory framework in my analysis. In his work on network society, Manuel Castells justifies his approach to researching social movements of a range of political persuasions. “Social movements may be socially conservative, socially revolutionary, or both, or none. After all we have now concluded (I hope forever) that there is no predetermined directionality in social evolution... [Social movements] are all symptoms of our societies, and all impact on social structures with variable intensities and outcomes that must be established by research.” (Castells, 2000: 73-74). A range of interesting questions emerged for me, as I began to follow the history and educational visions of the three organizations. To what extent do the political positions (left-right-center in the general sense of the terms) of organizations lead to particular ways of organizing? How are the left/center/right political positions framed and negotiated in transnational realms? How do these positions play out in the debates on education? The transnational social realm can be studied using ethnography, popular culture, text-centered methods, and case studies among other. Given that my project pays attention to the ways in which skilled diasporic actions are carried out within the accepted ideological frames of official narratives such as ‘education and development’, ‘networks and social impact’, and ‘material/cultural ways of returning’, I take up an eclectic methodological approach. Researchers of transnationalism have long advocated for methods ‘designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations’ (cited in Vertovec, 1999). In the same vein, the descriptive accounts of transnational experiences can be enhanced by paying attention to the historical,
political forces that shape these experiences. Drawing on the works in critical education policy, my methodological stance includes ethnographic components and textual and document analysis.

**Understanding Education-Actions in Transnational Contexts**

Studying diasporic actions in education opens up a research agenda that speaks to multiple disciplines. The topic at hand is connected to migration studies, diaspora formation and transnationalism, but in important ways, it also opens up questions of education policy. In recent years, the shifts in higher education, particularly with respect to greater internationalization and economic orientation have drawn attention to thinking about the interstices of the transnational aspects of work, community building and education. The analysis of the transnational work by Indian entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, for instance, needs to be extended to interrogating the political economy of outsourcing and the reforms in higher education in India.

Given that my project is connected to networks spanning transnational, national and sub-national spheres, I pay attention to the multiple contexts, ideologies and forces through which these social action groups operate and how they are connected to the changing policy orientation. In its broader understanding, policy analysis subsumes a number of inquiries and approaches. The most basic purpose of policy analysis is to help improve governance. An examination of diverse factors affecting policy production, processes, actors, reception and impact are therefore associated with the social endeavor of policy analysis. Given that policy decisions have consequences and they can determine social inclusion/exclusion, it is no surprise that policy discourse has attracted a great deal of scholarly and popular attention.
The most prevalent understanding of policy making is that it involves successively ordered stages starting with the rationale, input and negotiations and moving to the stages of outcome, implementation and assessment. Thus, a model policy generation would begin with “intelligence” about a problem, promotion of the issue, prescription of what should be done, innovation of a policy, application of the policy in practice, termination when the problem has been solved and appraisal of the impact. (Hudson and Lowe, 2004).

Such a conception of policy making has attracted criticisms, largely for its oversimplified and linear view of stages and the assumed rational order of decision making. The stage metaphor, for instance, posits a logical, almost mechanical progression from stage one to two and does not account for the complex interplay of dynamics in real-world policy. (Ham & Hill, 1993; Stone, 2002). Presenting another articulation of policy, Kingdon (1984) puts forth four-part functions of policy process involving agenda-setting, alternative proposals, decision-making and implementation. Additionally, the policy studies literature has given considerable space to determine an appropriate level of analysis including macro, meso and micro levels. Macro level analysis is associated with broader issues that shape the contexts in which policy is made. (Parsons, 1995). The big picture has acquired importance in reading policy in an increasingly global context in which policy is managed. On the other hand, Micro level analysis deals with “the most basic unit of society: individual people. This involves consideration of the impact that particular people (such as politicians, civil servants, trade union leaders) have in designing policy and in its final outcome.” (Hudson and Lowe, 2004: 8). Finally, meso-level analysis is concerned with how policies are produced in arrangements between institutions, structures and individuals. In particular, meso level analysis is characterized by two features: policy initiatives as responses to identified social problems and cultural-historical explanations. This project takes up an eclectic approach to studying
policy, drawing on a range of approaches of analysis and determining relevant units. In agreement with Hudson and Lowe (2004), this project recognizes the ‘messiness’ of policy process leading to an understanding of policy as complex and layered process involving structural and institutional arrangements of varied kinds that have profound effects on social life. Policies are official knowledge productions that are mediated by complex political economy and have unequal material effects on their recipients. Designed to be the solutions by experts, policy agendas bear the marks of varied contexts. As a result, policy processes are uneven, value-laden and tenuous. Calling for critical approaches to policy, Ball (1999) states that understanding policy is paying attention to "the complex relationships between ideas, dissemination of ideas and the recontextualization remain central tasks...Every time a discourse moves, there is space for ideology to play.". Policy contents are neither ahistorical nor isolated and involve in them construction, negotiation and repudiation of ideas and values. Official discourses often serve to naturalize dominant relations of power.

Data

In theorizing the production of diasporan participation and collaboration across real/virtual, local and transnational domains, a broad-based inquiry is required including special attention to various actors, conflicts and contexts. This project uses qualitative case study methods to generate data. Qualitative case study methods are also used to prepare in-depth descriptive accounts of various kinds during and after data collection. Qualitative methods are appropriate in the present context given that they are broadly structured toward understanding the nuances of social phenomenon in relation to its sociohistorical context and its interactive practices involving talk, text, interactions, group dynamics, and power relations. (Maxwell, 1996; Glesne, 2006). Qualitative methods are relevant here also for their
interests in understanding how social realities are constructed, interpreted and disputed. The data that shaped this project stemmed from a variety of different sources, collected during an extended period. Formally, my data collection took place during a period of 1.5 years, beginning in 2007. Informally, however, it started much earlier and continues till date. The data used in my analysis include: interviews and informational material gathered from three diasporic groups; policy texts prepared by governments and donor agencies.

What follows is a description of the different types of data that I acquired, used, or had access to as a part of my fieldwork. For a different project, I had prepared an inventory of Indian immigrant organizations in the U.S. to chart out remittance patterns. With the help of popular online portals and governmental data sources it is possible to find out near-accurate number of organizations working on a particular issue. First, Indian governmental outfits such as embassies and consulate maintain information about the Indian organizations abroad. Second, the groups tend to have web-presence as a strategy of outreach for potential donors/members. Third, mainstream immigrant websites such as the ones mentioned above provide information about these groups from time to time so as to highlight charities and social actions. “Organizations are not individuals and, unlike the latter, most seek public exposure, with leaders are generally willing to grant interviews and provide detailed information”. (Portes, 2005). A total of forty-seven organizations were identified on the database involving groups that are broadly involved in educational actions. Based on their membership strength and remittances, I initially chose the following six organizations for participation-observation.

My selection of the initial six organizations was based on applying basic four-part criteria: Membership strength of organization; Number of years in action; Participation in larger networks and the scope of intervention.
Upon studying the scope of all the six organizations and after preliminary interactions with some groups, I decided to narrow it down to the following organizations for my analysis: *Asha for Education, Pratham and Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation*. Documents/artifacts were the major sources of data that I began collecting early on in the project. These included a range of materials including public and private records, newsletters, transcripts of meetings and promotional materials. I decided to concentrate on documents first and then use interviews and observation to triangulate the data. The materials generated by organizations including their public views on education in India, their decision-making process and fundraising reports formed part of my initial notes. In the second stage, I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the three organizations. I had an opportunity to attend Asha’s biennial conference in 2007 where I was able to participate in discussions and meet with representatives of various chapters. My participation with Pratham and Ekal chapters involved extended conversations with their representatives and membership of their listservs. The information available online would have been sufficient to formulate analysis, but my experience of interacting with members revealed some of the important aspects of what it means to be participating in transnational organizing. As I appreciated the generosity of time given to me by some of the active members of these organizations, it allowed me to understand the numerous reasons with which people came to these organizations. Even
though my politics are different from Ekal foundation, for instance, I began to understand *how* an IT programmer could find some solace in giving her time and money to Ekal or how an Indian graduate student would turn to Asha when faced with a profound sense of alienation. The research questions generated for this project led me to focus on networks, cultural productions and practices. Thus personal politics of the individuals involved, their attitudes, motivations and opinions about educational issues in India are not part of my analysis. During data collection and analysis, I learned to separate the political positions of organizations from those that of individuals. Our differences arose mostly not about facts but about ideas. How do long-distance social actions work? Do they, perhaps unintentionally, represent an essentialized picture of India? What kind of social problems find a voice in diasporic organizations? These questions are packed in tensions that are at the core of *desi* political field where “[a]nimosities travel the oceans. Even here, in other worlds, Muslims and Hindus, Hindus and Sikhs, feminists and patriarchs, first and third generations frequently do not speak with each other, do not know each other, and often mistrust each other.” (Chatterji, 2005).

For my first informal interactions with the members of each of the organizations, I prepared a set of questions that focused on their personal connection to the organization. The questions I used were as follows: (a) How long have you been associated with the group? (b) Why did you decide to join? (c) What aspects of the organization do you like the most? (d) Can you talk about a specific project you worked on? (e) What, in your opinion is the contribution of your organization? Almost always, we would start with question-answer format that would soon become a conversation during which I would gain greater clarity
Discourse-Based Analysis

In recent years, the scholarship in critical education policy analysis has drawn attention to the structural, social and ideational bases of public policy making. From such a perspective, policy texts are seen within its political, cultural contexts; hence open for multiple interpretations. Emerged out of the intellectual traditions of semiotics and linguistic philosophy, the approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) explores the role of discourse (official and colloquial) in projecting and shaping contemporary political reality (van Dijk, 2005, 2008). Analyzing education policy within the discourse-centered framework, Sarah Taylor (2004) turns to the following three features that can help understand the ways in which networks are associated to social practices: (a) Genres: ways of (inter)acting or relating, (b) Discourses - ways of representing, representation, and (c) Styles - ways of being, identities. Following the scholarship in critical education, I use discourse-based approaches to illuminate the connections between education, diaspora and development. The large-scale non-state actors, supra-national organizations and state-policy outfits all participate in constructing the discursive production of ‘India’s education’, its varied needs and dimensions. The education-actions of diasporic organizations, for instance, can be seen as part of the anxiety of identity, an extension of transnational social life or a struggle around meaning.

The three organizations I study are involved in similar diasporic practices including innovative fund raising, information producing and approaching donors. What they differ
from each other, however, is in the kind of transnational engagements they are involved in. In
my analysis, discourse plays an important part for, as the narratives suggest, certain terms
have become part of the vocabulary of development and education reform in the third world.
This chapter has focused on the methodological issues in the design and analysis of the
present project. The discussion involves my own informal and formal involvement in the
project, units of analysis in organizations research, possible choices of methods in collecting
data and studying policy within cultural-critical contexts. The next chapter presents in-depth
descriptions and narratives of each of the groups studied.
Chapter 5

Educational Action: Narratives, Practices, Claims

Have you watched Swades? I mean its a total bollywood flick, but you know... Shah Rukh goes back to his village and motivates people there to become self-sufficient. I see parallels with what we do. We want to enable people and use our skills.

Pratham volunteer in conversation with me.

Idyllic Village/Awaiting Nation

References to the bollywood blockbuster *Swades* (Place/Country) appear in my interviews as well as in the promotional materials of the three organizations I studied. A number of Hindi films depict the relationship between diaspora and India, mostly bound by the celebration of heterosexual love, eventually resulting in marriage to complete the global Indian family. Even as it involves a stereotypical NRI in the lead, *Swades* departs from the genre of ‘NRI longing for all things Indian’. Mohan Bhargav, the protagonist is an accomplished scientist who works with NASA and discovers rural India in one of his visits. For Bhargav, the Indian village is a place of love as well as social backwardness. Moved by rural poverty, casteism and the lack of education, Bhargav takes a lead in building a makeshift generator off nearby waterfall that would electrify the village. The villagers come together to construct a small dam and thus become the agents of their own development.

Meanwhile, torn between his career and the ‘call from his nation’, Bhargav chooses the latter and returns. The story of *Swades* is fascinating on many levels. It is perhaps the only popular Hindi film in recent times that has connected Indian diaspora to the project of national development. In what could be termed a reversal of brain- drain and an affirmation of the direction of Indian development, *Swades* unpacks a powerful narrative documenting how the
skilled diasporas are uniquely positioned to provide solutions for the roadblocks in Indian progress. *Swades* points out two important shifts that have occurred in thinking about India’s development. First, transnational actors are legitimate participants in the national debates on development. Second, the crux of development lies in individuals and communities devising solutions for themselves. The instrumentality of village school in steering a sense of self-reliance occupies a recurring reference throughout the film.

The case of *Swades* offers a point of entry to think about the politics and method of diasporic engagement. Presenting on the data gathered from three diasporic organizations, *Asha for Education, Pratham, and Ekal Foundation* this chapter pays attention to the history, vision, philosophy and practices of educational action espoused by each of the groups. To start, the detailed narration of the groups helps highlight their similarities in practice and differences in politics. It also helps establish the uneven, contested and conflicting aspects of the diasporic networks. As the data reveal, each of the groups approach social action with their own, distinct set of political beliefs. The data also illuminate the ways in which the problematic of education is constructed and policy solutions are advocated.

**Asha for Education: Development and Depoliticization**

Retracing the history of *Asha for Education*, its monumental growth, and how it has become an integral part of the graduate student experience for many Indian students in the U.S. are some of the commonly occurring points in my interviews transcripts. A sizable population of young, graduate students across U.S. is behind the peer-to-peer networked organization like *Asha*. As recounted on its website, the story of Asha began in the summer
of 1991 when a handful of graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley began to think about the ways in which they could play a role in the development of India, the country of their origin. These young people shared the belief that education is a critical requisite and an effective catalyst for social and economic change in India. Basic education became the agenda for the action group that emerged from this gathering. The group was named Asha to represent the hope that had brought these individuals together and the hope that they aimed to bring into the lives of children in India.

Asha for Education, (https://www.ashanet.org/)

The small, informal group in California expanded as many Asha chapters began to be formed on other college campuses. In order to coordinate all the chapters, Asha was streamlined in 1995 by setting in place the mission, structure, objectives and decision-making process. Working through the informal social networks of Indian graduate students, it became a space for interaction, familiarity, information and social action. Organizationally, an Asha-wide committee was set up to decide the scope of group’s action and to coordinate communication between various chapters. Asha’s work has been mostly focused on providing financial assistance to various ongoing projects in India through collaboration with Indian NGOs, civic groups and schools. As of 2008, the organization had had 66 chapters worldwide, including 44 in the US, and over a thousand active volunteer members. Between 1995-2004, Asha provided funding for 385 educational projects in India and disbursed $6.07 million dollars. Run purely on the efforts of volunteers, the work with Asha involves preparing project proposals, fundraising, site visits, maintaining accounts, outreaching to potential donors, organizing marathons for fundraising and cultural events among other.

In recent years, the website [http://www.ashanet.org] has become an important tool to disseminate information and generate donations. By way of introducing the organization to lay persons, NGOs, potential donors and sponsors, the website contains concise information
about Asha’s work, presented in an accessible and general format. To start, Asha’s overall mission, as presented on the website involves “catalyzing socio-economic change in India through education of underprivileged children”. The organization is introduced with a list of objectives. Thus, Asha’s work involves:

1. Providing education to underprivileged children in India.

2. Encouraging the formation of various local groups across the world to reach out to larger sections of the population.

3. Support and cooperation with persons and groups already engaged in similar activities.

4. Raising the required human and other resources to achieve the group objectives.

5. Provide opportunities to individuals living outside India who wish to participate in Asha activities in India.

6. Addressing, whenever possible, other issues affecting human life such as health care, environment, socio-economic aspects and women's issues.

Couched in such an open-ended and general language, the objectives do not tell much about Asha’s specific plans or visions. However, they do give a sense of ‘how’ the organization chooses to frame the issues of education and its support for certain projects. Asha has funded a range of projects including access to primary education, alternative and non-formal education, special education, infrastructural support for schools, and matters of community development. Smaller amounts of funds disbursed over a range of projects illustrate Asha’s

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8 Given that Asha functions primarily as funding organization, it is not clear where these objectives fit. There is no evidence/documentation, for instance, that Asha runs education projects of any kind (contrary to what is stated in the objective #1)
funding patterns. For instance, out of 268 projects supported by Asha in 2006, 51 received $10,000 and more.\textsuperscript{9}

Being a registered nonprofit organization under 501 (c) 3, Asha’s funding methods involve ‘transparency, volunteerism and accountability’ (Asha for Education). In the same vein, leadership training forms an important component of its organization in the U.S.

“Involvement with Asha has produced an awareness about developmental issues in India and has inspired a whole range of volunteers to get involved in other social causes…Thus, Asha, while making a difference in the lives of underprivileged children of India, is also preparing a group of people who are more socially aware and socially responsible in their lives.” (Asha for Education).

A general description of Asha’s actions opens up some questions. What is Asha’s educational philosophy? What is their vision for public schooling in India? What does their decision-making process involve? What kind of coalition building is admissible to Asha? A set of ‘core values’ articulated by the organization offer a clear response:

1. Asha is non-sectarian, secular and volunteer run organization.

2. Asha is non-political in that it does not “support a particular political party or ideology”

3. Local chapters are decision-making units

4. Funding is subject to completion of adequate documentation

A typical project involves the following stages: First, Indian NGOs or organizations seeking grants must draft a funding proposal (sometimes with the help of an Asha member) that is

\textsuperscript{9} The largest funding support $94,000 was awarded to \textit{Parikrama}, a Bangalore-based NGO, followed by \textit{Digantar}, one of the oldest alternative education group received $75,000. For Asha’s project distribution, please see appendix.
discussed by volunteers of a particular chapter. Second, an Asha volunteer visits the site to collect first-hand information about project needs and gives his/her feedback to the concerned chapter. Upon approval, the applicants are required to submit progress reports along with other documentation.10

Talking Indian Education With Asha Members

“Sorry, but we cannot endorse anything that is not related to education. And about Coca-Cola, we’d rather get them to sponsor one of our projects than protest against them…”

With these words, a long meeting between representatives of Asha and Coalition Against Coke Contracts (CACC) at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign came to an end11. I had not formally decided on my research project at that time and was attending the meeting on behalf of CACC, a student group on campus that was organizing public action against the university’s exclusive contractual relationship with Coca-Cola. We were arguing that the university should not tie up with a corporation involved in human, labor and environmental rights violations in Colombia, India, Turkey and Indonesia. CACC had approached a number of campus and community groups, including Asha, for solidarity and (non-financial) support. Asha’s refusal in this case was not a surprise since they had been consistently absent from progressive South Asian actions on campus, and had emphatically recited that their goals did not allow them to work beyond a narrow, constricted role as a fundraising organization.

Contrary to their claims of apoliticality, Asha routinely co-sponsored and supported some of the conservative Indian groups on campus. An elementary reasoning of Asha-UIUC’s apathy

10 This documentation usually involves a declaration by the recipients that their project is not political.
11 Coalition Against Coke Contracts[http://caccuc.blogspot.com/] was part of the student-led campaigns against Coca-Cola that have developed on more than 50 U.S. campuses. For more information, see IndiaResourceCenter [www.indiaresource.org/]
to progressive South Asian politics leads us to consider the following factors. First, *Asha’s* obligation to its donors would likely to have defined the extent of its political involvement. Second, given that the local chapters are autonomous, the membership of a particular chapter plays a role in negotiating the decisions about scope and solidarity.

The purpose of providing a detailed account of my experience with a local *Asha* chapter is not to be accusatory of the leadership or make generalizations about the larger organization. Similarly, I do not hold that progressive political views (in their loose and open-ended sense) alone can be meaningful ways of engaging and collaborating. My main purpose here is to steer the conversation toward exploring some of the critical questions about donor-centric approaches to social action. What counts as educational action? What are the strengths and limitations of donor-centered approach to education? Is it possible to be a fund-raising organization and be critical? These questions appeared in my conversations with Asha members and similar questions were raised at the organization’s biennial meet. The relationship with donors, Asha’s goals and plans are addressed in a public document entitled *Asha: Positioning and Strategic Game plan 2005*. It is useful to turn to this document with the questions mentioned above. “Asha is gaining visibility and industry buzz… Charity Navigator ranked Asha for Education as the top charity…with a total score of 69.82 (out of 70) in the field of International Relief and Development.” Addressing the challenges, the document states “Asha shares the philanthropic wallet with a range of organizations and growing competition”. A way out of the crowded-out market of non-profit is to develop a ‘unique Asha-Brand’ that would render the singular message of this organization. (Asha for Education, 2005).
Asha Conference, New Jersey: Anxieties and Questions

As part of my data collection, I attended the Biennial conference organized by Asha in New Jersey in 2007. The conference was attended by representatives of Asha chapters across United States and it provided an opportunity to the participants to revisit Asha’s projects, learn about the work done by other chapters and hear education activists from India. For me, the conference was an incredibly interesting site, for it showed the attempts to rethink the given common sense about fundraising. My field notes from the conference as well as the interview transcripts point to the tension at work among Asha members between funding-focus and awareness-focus. I also learned a number of ways in which Asha had raised funds. For instance, the marathon races organized in the various parts of the country raised $650,000 in the year 2006, while the Seattle chapter had obtained maximum corporate grants ($2.5 million) that year.12

“Clearly, we are raising more than we can disburse. We have about $5 million in the Bank; but there are not that many projects that we can take on right now”, said Kapil, who had been working with the Asha-wide national coordination committee. Kapil had first heard of Asha in his undergraduate institution IIT-Chennai. In the United States, he worked with Asha for 8-years. I asked him what he had found most interesting about the organization.

I think... for me... what is fascinating is that Asha exists as a functioning democracy with all its faults. So we have all these processes, conversations and yet people not voting etc. In that sense, it is the microcosm of the Indian democracy itself. So, formulating policies here tells us the difficulties in formulating policies on a national scale.

But what policy effect was Asha hoping?

We are working with NGOs, schools and we are supporting so many projects. Our role is to empower the people and create awareness about their rights. NGOs are

12 Details of income and expenses attached.
slowly getting a say in policy. At least the issues of access of education to all and child labor are discussed because there are many NGOs and groups working on it.

As we turned to Asha’s innovative strategies of fundraising, Kapil gave a brief account of possible sources of funding for Asha.

In addition to the marathon runs, our donations come from corporations. We have written grant proposals to Yahoo Foundation, Oracle, and EBay etc...so Asha silicon valley for example last year got $20,000 from the Yahoo Foundation last year. We also get matching donations from Micro Soft. There are also folks who go to our website and donate—this is because we have grown so much, and because we have been given very good rating by charity navigator.

Kapil’s views about Asha’s role in policy and its alliance with NGOs were echoed by other members as they presented the need for education reforms in terms of access, quality and child labor eradication. The questions about adhering to ‘depoliticized’ discourses of education, development and transnational action appeared in the conference as adjuncts to other issues such as fundraising and future projects. Vinod Raina, the grassroots educator from India was the main speaker. In his speech, the question of critical commitment to education was at the center. “It is good that Asha has been involved in many projects and that it is a zero-overhead organization.” Raina began,

but you should consider having a more progressive engagement with India’s education. I have been working with grassroots groups in India for twenty years, and let me assure you, our topmost need is not funds from abroad.

Raina called for a move from Asha’s current ‘sub-critical’ position on education. His speech was respectful, impassioned and accessible. The questions he raised were picked up from some of the ongoing conversations at the conference. These questions cannot be resolved in short periods for an organization that is involved in fundraising for 18-years. A number of diasporic organizations in the U.S. operate within, what I call the ‘Asha model’ of social actions built on hierarchical network and developed around supporting a range of projects.
Pratham: Between High-Net Worth Donors and Grassroots Workers

With a series of grants from multiple international foundations and corporations ($9 million from the Hewlett & Gates Foundation; $2 million from Google, among others), the Pratham group has drawn a great deal of attention by the international media as well as non-profit/non-governmental circles. A steady stream of growing support for Pratham includes international banks, celebrities, foundations, corporate houses and transnational businesspersons of Indian origin. With a small volunteer-base, Pratham was founded in Mumbai in 1994 with partial involvement by UNICEF. Its initial work revolved around enabling access to education for the children living in Mumbai’s slums. Over the past 15-years, the organization has grown tremendously and it is now active in 21 states in India. Pratham has also been able to bring together in partnership the local and state government units, school boards and a large number of volunteers. The USA network of Pratham was formed in 1999, and some of the early chapters started in New York, Chicago, Houston and Bay area. There are three broad types in which Pratham’s actions are organized: The Urban Direct Action (UDA) programs in low-income communities, a national survey project focused on basic learning levels of elementary school children, and an initiative to improve literacy skills on mass level. Pratham’s Urban Direct Action (UDA) project involves the following actions. ¹³

Pre-schools (balwadis) for children of ages 3-6 years.
Community libraries.
Remedial learning programs.
Classes focused on teaching skills like computers.
Outreach programs for child laborers and at risk children.
Textbooks in local languages

¹³ The Urban Direct Actions (UDA) are concentrated mainly in Maharashtra whereas the other initiatives by Pratham in recent years---ASER and Read India are carried out throughout India.
Learning and Literacy

While continuing with its work in the 1990s that was developed around resource creation, Pratham has obtained a renewed focus in recent years. The action work involves educational data production, assessment of basic learning skills of elementary school children, production of textbooks and projects enhancing reading, writing and math.

The first initiative is Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), an innovative approach to producing community-led local knowledge. ASER work includes constructing surveys on basic reading, math and arithmetic skills among children going to school in rural areas. In doing so, the purpose is to 1) get reliable estimates of the status of children’s schooling and basic learning (reading and arithmetic level) at the district level; and (ii) to measure the change in these basic learning and school statistics from last year. (Wadhva, 2007). Pratham’s aim is to survey all rural districts and using the estimates to understand the levels of learning for all the states. The sample size of these surveys consists of 30 villages and 600 households per district and 20 households per village. (ASER, 2007). The surveys include seeking information as well as determining learning skills of children (6 to 14 years of age). The following questions/tests are part of the surveys.

- Questions about status of enrollment
- Standard (grade) information and tuition issues
- Reading & Arithmetic tasks
- Comprehension and Problem solving
- Local language(s) and English

Pratham has developed multilingual materials to test all the four parts mentioned above.

Producing surveys for all the rural schools in India is a monumental task by the sheer number

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14 ASER 2007 and 08 reports are available at[www.pratham.org/]
15 The report uses the word ‘test’, however, as the contexts and descriptions suggest, these surveys are carried out through informal conversations, games and stories.
of schools, languages and school systems involved. For this, Pratham has created networks of volunteers in every district of the country who are conducting the surveys in their own towns and villages. The task of producing educational data was taken up earlier solely by state. With the projects like ASER, it is the organizations and communities that are engaging in producing meaningful data about education in their towns and districts. The ASER survey also includes visits to schools and exchanges with parents and teachers. The ASER 2007 report opens with an elaborate depiction of the actual process of survey.

Sitting in the courtyard of her house in a village in Uttar Pradesh, Sangeeta was concentrating. First, she listened to the problem …“Suppose your mother gave you fifty rupees and asked you to buy something from the market for fifteen rupees. How much money would you have left? Sangeeta thought for a while. After a few minutes, very shyly she asked. “Can I make lines?” We gave her paper and pencil. Painstakingly, she began to make marks on the paper. We could hear her counting softly to herself as she drew the lines “……12, 13, 14, 15, 16,……..Meanwhile, the day carried on around us. Sangeeta’s mother was busy feeding the buffaloes that were tied to a post in the courtyard. She talked to us about her children and their school, as she went about her work. Sangeeta’s grandfather was getting impatient. He wanted the child to hurry up. Neighbours were curious so they came to chat as well. Soon they brought their children and wanted us to see if their children could read and do arithmetic. Other children who had been playing with an old tyre[sic] under a big tree came running to see what was going on. (Banerjee, 2007: 4)

The conversations, story-telling and games with which the surveys are carried out occur in “courtyards and lanes and even in the middle of fields.” The report reiterates what has been noted by many researchers, that parents and community members show extreme interest in the education of their children, and want quality education. (Sen and Dreze, 2000; PROBE, 2004). The Pratham group identifies the sites such as courtyards and village markets as important places to construct educational surveys and notes that

Whether the adults are literate or not, the assessment activity itself leads to curiosity and questions… Sometimes children surprise themselves. Something new is added right then and there. And strategies and solutions begin to emerge.

(Banerjee, 2007)
The ASER report findings state that among the large proportion of children enrolled in schools, less than half could read fluently or do arithmetic by grade 5. Thus, a follow-up initiative ‘Read India’ developed around improving the reading, writing and arithmetic skills for children under 14. This is a two-year long project (2007-09) that covers the same rural schools from ASER and introduces learning materials developed by Pratham professionals. Additionally, Pratham group has been able to tie up with schools to arrange 40 minutes of school for literacy lessons.

Talking Education With Pratham Members

“…We have an outpour of Bollywood celebrity endorsements. Amitabh Bachchan, Wahida Rahman, Amir Khan…and Kal Penn!”

The excitement in Sonam’s voice was evident from the moment we began talking and it helped us ease into an open conversation. The Public Relations officer at Pratham’s main office in Houston had directed me to Sonam who had been working with Pratham’s Seattle chapter. She was working with Microsoft and had established contacts with the professional Indian community in Seattle. Prior to speaking with Sonam I had an opportunity to interact with some members from Houston. Our conversations made me aware of the multiple organizational layers in Pratham. From publicity campaigns, celebrity endorsements, to the grass-root work focusing on learning levels, the organization has incorporated multiple styles, agendas and it speaks in a spectrum of ideological tongues. For instance, Pratham’s carefully researched ASER report demonstrated its commitment to public participation, community-centered policy and grass-roots methods of educational change. Contrary to the focus of its India networks, the fundraising sessions in the U.S. involve expensive fashion shows and celebrity tours. In September 2008, for example, the Seattle chapter organized a
big fundraiser gala in which India’s top models walked to help “60 million underprivileged children in India.” With a $250 ticket, the Seattle chapter of Pratham raised $200,000 at the event. The difference between Indian and U.S. chapters reveal the practices of social organizing in collaborative, multi-actor networks. It also points at the role of northern and southern contributors to Pratham. Explaining Pratham’s fundraising, Sonam explained

We don’t give money to build schools or NGOs working in India. We use the money for our projects. Our fundraising is based on the model of targeting high-net-worth individuals. So instead of raising smaller amounts from a lot of people, we seek bigger donations from a small donor base.

Pratham-USA’s tours with Bollywood celebrities and models explain this strategy. “But don’t you have to put in huge amounts of money in order to raise such high-end donations?” I asked.

Well, in a way it is true… but that’s where corporate sponsorships come into the picture, and a lot of our members are professionally well- placed to secure large amounts in donations and to organize these events.

Sonam told me about her days in Texas before moving to Seattle and how she happened to attend an event featuring the yester-year Bollywood star Wahida Rahman, and discovered Pratham.

Celebrity endorsements have given us a lot of visibility in India and abroad. We were able to draw young crowds and convince them that they can make a difference.

Elaborating on the contributions by US chapters, Sonam explained that the main role of these chapters is to build awareness in the diasporic community and larger donor circles.

Our conversation moved towards Pratham’s educational philosophy and vision.

At present we are committed to complete the Read India project by the 2009. We want to keep working with the central government, many state governments and NGOs.

With ASER, Pratham had already been making inroads into shaping education policy.
This is the first concrete step in which, I believe we are having an impact on policy. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with state governments that allows for keeping 45 minutes of school time everyday for Pratham’s literacy lessons... Our founder, Mr. Madhav Chavan has been hired by the central government to serve on the common minimum board on education. This board works directly with the office of Prime Minister. So we are in a position to make an effective political advocacy.

Madhav Chavan heads the National Advisory Council on Education. Additionally, a number of Pratham officials are recognized and consulted by the government of India.

It’s a fact that we have elite connections in India and here. But the point is we have been able to use them for Pratham. In that sense, our aim is to work “bottom up” for change, but by using a “top-down” approach.

**Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation: Education, Religion and the Unfinished Business of Hindutva**

You are here for a great cause... At the Ekal Foundation, you are transforming young minds at the grassroots level in remote villages in India… Renu Khator, President and Chancellor of the University of Houston, speaking at a fund-raiser organized by the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, Houston.

$365 a year for one school.A dollar a day, for which we can't even buy a Coke in New York. Talk to your friends. This is our debt to our country where we were born. Quoted in Rao, Ravishankar and Swamy, 2005

Why do Ekal vidyalayas exist? …their purpose is in fact not education alone…The Ekal Vidyalayas Act As A Recruiting Base For Sangh Cadre. Gopalakrishnan and Sreenivasa, 2008

In a promotional interview about *Ekal Vidyalaya* (One Teacher School) Foundation, the board members Sucheta Kapuria and Bipin Shah begin by stating that in the past seven years the Ekal foundation has added 23,000 schools to its network of one-teacher, community-based schools across the *adivasi* regions of India. *Ekal Foundation of India* (EVFI), Ekal Foundation, United States and Ekal International are the three main nodes in the far-reaching chain of volunteers, teachers, NGOs, donors and various *Ekal* chapters. Ekal or ‘one teacher’ schools are non-formal, pre-schools and supplemental schools that focus on

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16 Sangh is a family of organizations affiliated to Hindu right.
local culture and involve community members as teachers. To be precise, Ekal schools design their own curriculum based on ‘samskaras’ or moral Hindu teaching, along with a blend of local customs. According to the official website of *Ekal* Vidyalaya Foundation, there are currently 13,902 schools run by the organization with a total of 39,6956 students (as of June 2004).

The *Ekal* Vidyalaya Foundation of India (EVFI) is one such concept that hopes to empower young tribal children in India through education. The premise of EVFI is “*Ek Shikshak, Ek Vidyalaya*”, which means “one teacher for every school”. (Ekal, 2008).

There are fourteen *Ekal* chapters in the United States where it is a sister organization to India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF), one of the largest diasporic network that supports various development projects in India. IDRF has received much criticism for its support to the right-wing Hindu groups in India that were alleged to have been diverting development assistance from the U.S. to finance religious bigotry (Khoj, 2005; Chatterji, 2004; Sabrang, 2002).\(^{17}\)

Many overseas Indian Hindus—including some in this country—finance religious groups in India in the belief that the funds will be used to build temples, and educate and feed the poor of their faith. Many would be appalled to know that some recipients of their money are out to destroy minorities (Christians as well as Muslims) and their places of worship. (Rekhi and Rowen, 2002)

*Ekal*’s role in development and education has been questioned on similar grounds. Its ties to the *Sangh*, the emphasis on Hinduization in curricula, and its growing networks in the

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\(^{17}\) A report entitled ‘Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRFand the American Funding of Hindutva’ by Sabrang (2002) collective presents extensive documentation exposing the connections between IDRF, the Hindu Right and development funds. IDRF has rejected the report and has it denied its connections with the right-wing Hindu groups. However, there is clear evidence connecting the IDRF office bearers to the *Sangh*, its role in mismanaging the funds as well as instigating communalism.
The Structure of Ekal Schools

The idea of one-teacher-school networks goes back to the early 1980s. Dr. Rakesh Popli, a US-based scientist moved back to India to do volunteer work in the state of Jharkhand where he thought of establishing a network of small schools in the region. In the 1990s, global support networks for Ekal were in operation as informal efforts of resource generation. It was in 2000 that the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India (EVFI) was officially formed and soon the Ekal-USA was registered as a non-profit, 501 (c)3 organization. The Ekal foundation is part of the Sangh or Hindu Right, which is a family of organizational clusters involving the following prominent constituents:

1. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS-Trans: National Volunteers Organization): An antecedent of all the Hindu Right outfits that was formed in 1925 and includes 4 million volunteers.
2. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP- Trans: Indian People’s Party): the political wing of the Sangh that contests elections on the agenda of Hindu nationalism
5. Seva Bharati (Trans: Service India): focuses on relief and rehabilitation

Education for long has been the nucleus of Sangh’s efforts to outreach, gain cadres and shape the popular imagination. Vidya Bharati, the overarching system of various educational initiatives run by Sangh is one of the largest networks of schools across India. RSS (National Volunteer Organization), the cultural front of the Hindu Right, set up the first pre-school in U.P. in 1952. As schools began to grow nation-wide, “an all-India co-coordinating body,
called Vidya Bharati, was set up with its headquarters in Delhi. The *Vidya Bharati* educational mission is founded on the objective of training children to see themselves as protectors of a Hindu nation.” (Ekal India). The educational initiatives of the *Sangh* are produced below.

Table 2

*Educational Institutions run by Vidya Bharti*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vidya Bharti Institutions</th>
<th>Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhartiya Adhyapak Parishad (Indian Teachers Association)</td>
<td><em>Teacher Training Initiatives</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samanvitt Medhavi Vidyarthy Kalyan Parishad (Welfare of Gifted Students)</td>
<td>Coaching students to appear for national competitive examinations and civil services jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhartiya Itihas Sanklan yojana (The Project of Writing Indian History)</td>
<td>Propagating the scholarship on Hindu history and achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samskar Bharti (Organizations focusing on ‘samskaras’ or the moral code)</td>
<td>Promoting Hindu cultural events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (All India Students Wing)</td>
<td>Propagation of Hindu nationalist thought among college going students and building cadre for BJP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (Schools for the welfare of indigenous communities)</td>
<td>Residential schools in the Adivasi areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekal Vidyalayas (One Teacher Schools)</td>
<td>Community-led, local schools for early education and primary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the varied system of *Sangh*’s education initiatives, *Ekal* schools represent flexible and relatively easy-to-manage arrangements. These are non-formal schools and are meant to complement the regular stream. Given that these schools do not incur high costs for infrastructural support and typically involve local volunteers as teachers, the *Ekal* fundraising
documents emphatically state that the year-long expenses of each school can be met by $365. In fact, ‘dollar-a day’ has been the most consistent fund-raising catch-phrase of Ekal-USA and one-time website donations to Ekal need to be minimum $365 (Ekal).

Shyam Gupta, the coordinator for Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation India (EVFI) spells out five core tenets of Ekal pedagogy in his interview with Organiser, the weekly publication of Sangh. According to Gupta, the very idea of Ekal is based on the assumption that the current schools, especially those run by the government are inadequate and deficient. Departing from the heavily informationalized nature of education, the Ekal system is organized around the wisdom of how to lead a good life and build a strong national character. Second, these schools involve “local culture and customs in the curricula… such as the village livelihood, information about the harvest, and local legends so that children can understand their surroundings better”(Organizer, 2004). Third, Ekal teachers are from the same community, who work as volunteers or on a small honorarium Finally, cultural awakening through education is at the core of this project. Ekal schools teach seven subjects: Language, arithmetic, moral education, basic science, health, yoga, and creativity. (Organiser, 2004). The moral values form part of the daily activities.

- Respect for one’s mother, father, and teacher
- Respect for elders,
- Discipline and obedience
- Local religious prayer
- Basic health habits
- Patriotic songs
- Pride in the nation
- Care of a Tulsi plant.
  (Ekal Foundation, 2008; Khoj, 2005)

Outwardly, the emphasis on moral values appears to be an attempt to revive the traditions and establish cultural nationalism of a kind. However, in what respect the implied values are
understood to be a part of education? Concerns about Ekal pedagogy were brought to the notice of Central Board of Secondary Education by an independent human rights organization called Khoj. In its report on the inquiry of religious schools in India, Khoj questioned the relevance of moral values in Ekal schools.

What can be immediately seen from the section on Moral Values is that there is no mention of engendering any Constitutional Values: no mention of respect for the Equality of One and All, Equal Respect for All Religions, Belief in Common Property and Sharing, Equal Status for Men and Women and between Different Castes and Communities, the Engendering of Rational Outlook etc. (Khoj/Sabrang, 2005).

Additionally, the report drew national attention to many issues including the ‘insufficient’ training of teachers who work in Ekal schools, the inclusion of dominant Hindu imagery in its curricula, and the connection between Ekal and the growing religious violence in adivasi regions. The report called for an inquiry to find out “the grounds on which funds are sought from abroad by Ekal and scrutinize what they are actually used for” (Khoj/Sabrang, 2005:17). Similar concerns are echoed elsewhere.

So why do ekal vidyalayas exist? We would argue that their purpose is in fact not education alone. Equally if not more important than the impact on the children is the impact on the youth who are recruited as acharyas. The ekal vidyalayas address a key lacuna in the sangh strategy for adivasi areas: the lack of a village level presence. By providing an entry point to attract and train educated adivasi youth, who typically form the nucleus of any political formation, the ekal vidyalayas act as a recruiting base for sangh cadre.(Gopalakrishnan and Sreenivasa, 2008)

What is crucial here is how education and development have become vehicles to consolidate the base for Hindu right and Ekal schools essentially provide a cover for transnational
Hindutva organizing. “Development implemented by institutions affiliated with the Sangh Parivar lays the groundwork for hate and civil polarization.” (Chatterji, 2008).

Talking Indian Education with Ekal Members

“The recent bad publicity didn’t affect our fundraising one bit.” said Kala, who had been closely associated with Ekal. “The controversy was created by Pakistanis and Indian communists here whom no one takes seriously. People know us for our work.” I was chatting with her following a long email exchange with Ekal activists in Seattle and Houston area. Born and raised in Houston, Kala became connected to Ekal early on through her family. She volunteered with the organization and was subsequently hired to coordinate Ekal’s nationwide chapters in the U.S. She wanted to reach out to the younger demographic and bring in more corporate sponsorships for Ekal. I asked her about Ekal volunteer base and its fundraising strategies.

Immigrant community that settled in the US in 1970s has been our strongest support. They are mostly professional class like doctors, lawyers etc. We have also been working with temples and regional associations like Tamil Sangham(Tamil Association) and Telugu Sangham(Telugu Association) that have helped us in our projects.

Ekal, in her opinion, opened a way for Indians to connect back home. “It is not just through bollywood, but the values that they were perhaps part of growing up....”

I requested her to clarify what she meant by values.

\footnote{The relationship between diasporic funds, educational actions and domestic violence became undeniably clear during the anti-Muslim pogroms in the state of Gujarat in 2002 that saw an “active participation of the adivasis in the violence against the Muslims.” (Sabrang, 2002). The networks of education in this case have been connected to the recruiting, outreach and cadre-building efforts of the Hindu Right. From innocuous cultural rituals to more militant anti-minority rhetoric, the Sangh has used educational spaces to grow politically.}
I mean culture. We teach children that they should respect elders. We work in tribal areas where there’s no electricity or good roads. Our volunteers (here) know it fully well that they or their parents have made it in the US because of education and they want to do the same for others.

In the year 2007, Ekal-USA disbursed $3million to its Indian branch in order to be used towards schools. Discussing her plans for Ekal USA, Kala said,

We are pretty much set with organizing successful fundraising… we will soon have an internship program. But most importantly, we are having an impact on policy. We have gone where nobody has gone before. There are no schools or hospitals in the tribal area. The government in India is finally woken up to the fact that it can’t just ignore tribal people.

In order to fully understand the development of Hindutva in the U.S., it is important to pay attention to the dominant politics of multiculturalism that has replaced the complexities, contradictions and dynamism of religious traditions with an acritical celebration of dominant and at times problematic conceptions of religion. What is also important to the story of Ekal is that diasporic individuals turn to Hinduism and organizations such as Hindu Students Council or Ekal for a variety of reasons. Prashad (2008) narrates a compelling story of how young Indians seek religious spaces. “When I was twelve years old, American kids would gang up on me at the bus stop, yelling ‘Gandhi Dot’ and ask, ‘why do you people in India worship cows and drink cow urine?’ It is pretty tough for young Hindus stuck between two cultures.” More than Asha and Pratham, it is Ekal that shows how education actions are overtly political enterprises.

Diaspora and the Space of Education-Action

What are the core components of social organizing? The narratives of social movements emphasize the roles played by culture, art and humor in articulating some of the complex ideals that shape the practices of social action groups. It is also widely
acknowledged by community groups that through the process of social organizing, the members themselves go personal transformation and political education. Traditional social organizing developed around the political ideals such as solidarity, empathy, critique, awareness building, and consensus. In her description of South Asian social-change organizations in the U.S., Monica Das Gupta (2006) points out the struggles that are part of occupying a (counter) cultural space.

The South Asian social change organizations provide a space where those who cannot be model minorities, do not want to be, can speak and reconceptualize themselves as part of the ethnic cultures. These organizations open up a critical space in which they effectively unsettle the homogenizing model minority myth. They enable accounts of culture as contentious rather than static. To them, cultures are not hermetically sealed but are made porous through colonization, migration, and contemporary transnational flows. Consequently, they disrupt discussions of ethnic culture that runs on the binary oppositions of “traditional” and “Western”. Das Gupta (2006:61).

Similar articulation of social action is echoed by Prashad (2000) in his narration of the famous strike called by the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) in New York.

After three strikes in 1998 (13 May, 21 May and 1 July), the 24,000 taxi workers ride a buoyant tide despite a harsh response from City Hall. That over 50 percent of these drivers hail from South Asia and that they held fast against the city despite the nuclear jingoism on the subcontinent shows precisely what is possible. After 98 percent of the taxi workers supported the strike on 13 May, Biju Mathew, of the NYTWA, declared that “we have the most successful strike in the city’s history... Solidarity was produced in the process of the struggle, a process that must be endlessly crafted to endure the phalanx of the Establishment. (Prashad, 2000: 199)

The narratives presented in this chapter differ substantially from the ones Das Gupta and Prashad discuss. Asha, Ekal and Pratham chart out their actions without questioning the cultural and economic space they occupy. On the contrary, they participate in producing a static, essentialized understanding of India and a narrow understanding of education. This brings up some questions: Do technical specialty labor and working class labor articulate social actions in entirely different terms? The class-caste positions of the skilled diaspora do
not automatically lead to a particular kind of organizing and the culture of political protest, but can help understand the tenor of actions.

Table 3

*Diasporic Organizations and Action-Issues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Sources of Funding</th>
<th>Dissemination of Funds</th>
<th>Focus of Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>k-12 access; retention</td>
<td>Individual donations; corporate sponsorship</td>
<td>Direct grants to projects; NGOs</td>
<td>Capacity building; enhancing participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekal Foundation</td>
<td>Access to rural and Adivasi children; religious literacy</td>
<td>IDRF, corporate sponsorship, individual donations</td>
<td>Establishment of schools; curricular development; teacher education</td>
<td>Non-formal sector; enhancing participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratham</td>
<td>K-12 access; minimum levels of learning</td>
<td>Foundations grants; corporate funding</td>
<td>Nation-wide surveys; textbook production</td>
<td>Evaluating learning; meaningful access; enhancing participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three organizations privilege some of the terms and explanations constructed by the international donor discourse. Thus, universal primary education, access, community involvement and decentralization are some of the issues that have received consensus by the international agencies at large and are taken up by diasporic groups. What I find of interest here is *how* the knowledge about Indian education is produced transnationally. The ever increasing organizational clusters in education tell us about the new, networked arrangements no doubt, but it also draws attention to the changes this sector has undergone in recent time and how it is being discussed and understood in neoliberal terms (Kumar, 2008; 2006).
Closer narratives of education action, as discussed in this chapter, help us understand the heterogeneity and unevenness of the category diaspora and transnational action networks. In forming the narrative and analysis of each of the groups I have engaged with their vision for Indian education, their fundraising practices and their projects in India. The chapter also shows how diasporas participate in the transnational collaborative space and also continue to engage in producing their own, unique political identities and social actions in this process. Diasporic groups work with or without the state, corporations, and big donors. The nuanced reading of diasporic groups shows that current generalized terminology such as ‘transnationalism from below’, ‘horizontal networks’ needs to be developed further in order to account for the complex and heterogeneous character of the groups involved.
Chapter 6

Critical Analysis of Diasporan Education-Action Networks

Data belong to those from whom it is taken.
Cook, 2004:46

Where did the knowledge supporting neoliberalism and its structural adjustment programs (SAPs) come from?
Klees, 2001: 5

The Impact Story
In July 2009, the Indian parliament passed Right to Education (RTE) bill that would ensure free, compulsory and equitable education to every child. For this, various new institutional arrangements are created between the state and central governments, public and private schools, and a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in education. The bill also requires private schools to reserve 25% seats for students from lower economic backgrounds. While the demands for universal elementary and secondary education have been central to the progressive social organizing efforts in India for decades, the right-based campaigns such as RTE demonstrate the multi-layered, multi-organizational networks in education on the one hand; and the state’s attempts to respond to the diverse constituencies and agendas that make up these networks on the other. The construction of ‘parallel power structures’ in education have helped steer the rights-based policy, and with the passage of RTE bill, several questions arise about the politics of state action, the place of civil society and the ideas about social transformation in India. The case of RTE is illustrative on many grounds. For one, following the constitutional directive (1949) the state-appointed Kothari commission (1964) had emphatically expressed the need for common school system and free education for all. Neither of recommendations received state’s attention. The government/municipal schools were formed with the purpose of enabling, for
the first time, equal access and opportunity to those who were never part of institutional participation. Government schools crumbled under the steady resource crunch and became the only recourse for the poor and disadvantaged communities (Majumdar, 2004). As it was not legally enforceable, the constitutional directive of free education was never followed up. In the 1990s when supra national agencies entered India’s education policy landscape, access to elementary education was identified as an urgent matter that the state must address. 

Governed by the imperatives of structural adjustment programs, the policy initiatives in the 1990s such as ‘District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)’ and ‘education for all’ were geared toward enabling access through public-private partnerships, private initiatives, and through NGOs. A broad confluence of civil society organizations, social movements, southern and northern NGOs, donor agencies, diasporic groups brought back the issue of Right to Education (RTE) bill that had been tabled twice earlier. While different from common-school system, RTE has been one of the progressive initiates taken in recent years. The broader context of the RTE allows us to understand how vertical pressures from supra-national donor agencies and horizontal pressures from smaller groups play out in shaping the process and content of policy. What is significant in the success story of RTE is the selective alliance building on the part of the state. What does this mean for the culture of political protests and direct actions that have historically identified the state as a site to struggle for one’s right?

The three groups studied for this research are part of the larger support network for Right to Education campaign. Picking up the thread from last chapter, the present chapter engages in critical analysis of diasporic educational actions. In particular, I interpret some of the themes around which Asha, Ekal and Pratham have developed their actions. A useful
question to begin examining diasporic actions would be why/how some issues are taken up to be deserving of transnational action while ignoring others. For instance, despite the Sachhar committee report (2007) that stated gross neglect and institutional discrimination against Muslims, and the Human Rights Watch documenting blatant caste discrimination against dalits in higher education, these issues have not found voice or allies among diasporic action groups. Instead, the diasporic groups have fashioned their actions along similar lines developed by the supra-national actors, foundations and the state. This is done by accepting the premise of development on the one hand, and fixed articulations of the problems of Indian education on the other. Thus, child labor, poverty, and lack of educational access to girls are identified as major problems in education, and the availability of education as solution. While these issues form a significant part of the reality of Indian education, the ‘solution centric’ articulations do not engage in identifying the structural issues at hand. The focus on selectively identified topics isolates certain issues for transnational engagements and it deflects the attention away from how inequality and social exclusion play a role in producing and reproducing educational deprivation.

**Vocabulary of Development/Education/Action**

The complex relationship between texts, images, discourses and representation is often explored to discuss objectification, social reproduction and commodification (Baudrillard, 1981; van Dijk, 1998; 2005; 2008). In the media-saturated nature of transnational practices, the diasporic groups participate in constructing, disseminating and reproducing useful information for a variety of audiences. Through their newsletters, publicity materials, reportage to donors they create dynamic texts using messages, stories,
anecdotes, images and experiences. For unknown website visitors and potential donors, such texts create familiarity, and help establish their part in the action. As the data gathered with Asha, Ekal and Pratham show, the online tools such as ‘shop and help’ and merchandise sale bring to surface the role of consumerism in social actions.

The Oscar-winning film Slumdog Millionaire has captured hearts around the world. Of the millions who have seen it, many wonder what they can do to help children from India’s slums...One of the best things you can do to help is to make a donation to Asha for Education -- please use the Google Checkout form on the right side of this page.
Asha for Education [http://www.ashanet.org/]

Hindu charity can stop Christian conversions. The missionary budget aimed at India is $100 billion a year. Each NRI must adopt one village...Charge It for IDRF (Code: 623427) with your Schoolpop Platinum Visa® Card!

India Charities: Support Ekal Foundation

Sixty million children in India will get added help in basic math, reading and writing from the non-profit organization Pratham, thanks in part to a $9.1 million grant from the William and Flora Hewlett and Bill & Melinda Gates foundations.
Pratham, USA

The roles discourses play in creating consent, naturalizing dominance, and forming opinion are well known (van Dijk, 2008). Similarly, examining discourses is crucial in central to thinking about, how, at a given juncture, a particular institutional or policy message is coded, received and how it can lead to social action. Critical theoretic approaches, particularly developed in the traditions of critical pedagogy, policy and discourse studies offer a useful intellectual framework to untangle the connections between official knowledge, social relations and social practices. These frameworks stress on paying attention to the ways in which discourses are produced, reproduced and appropriated. The engagement of diasporic groups with India’s education is discursively produced using the recurrent themes such as development, participation, access and economic productivity. This is done on certain assumptions about the reality and needs of education in India.
1. Access to school is an important first step in addressing social inequality in India.

2. Education will enhance civic participation

3. An educated workforce is good for national interests.

Such assumptions are supported by the terminology of development such as ‘participation’, ‘community empowerment’, ‘transparency’ etc. Understanding the history of development in India allows us to analyze these terms, their contexts and significance.

**NGOs in Education: Managing Social Problems**

The three groups discussed in this project describe themselves as ‘social action groups’, ‘policy communities’, ‘non-profit/non-governmental groups’ and state that their work contributes to making/shaping policy. The multiple levels and aspects of their engagement is indicative of the new, much complex picture of policy making that has transformed from being singular and hierarchical, to multiple and horizontal. The participation of the non-state actors in education increased in India during the 1980s when planning in most of the third world came under the shadows of looming economic crisis and international intervention. The obvious changes in education included a reduction in the role of the state as provider and manager of education and the formation of public-private partnerships that made way for non-state actors to become involved in the various aspects of educational management. Cutting back on social welfare was one of the conditions that led to the production of new policy priorities. For education, it set in motion a wide range of reforms in administration, curriculum design, assessment and teacher education.

A defining event for the changes in education policy in the third world occurred in 1990 when the multilateral agencies convened a conference in Jomtien, Thailand. This meet
was intended to create definite guidelines and facilitate new policy agenda for developing
countries around the idea ‘education for all’. The conference was attended by the
representatives of 155 national governments, 20 intergovernmental bodies and 50 NGOs.
Primary education was chosen to be the site for advocacy in developing countries, and the
increase in literacy levels and enrollment were identified as the areas to focus on. The
Jomtien declaration was followed by regular successive conferences that steered the direction
of change in education. In India, the external aid was allowed into primary education for the
first time, creating conditions for future initiatives such as District Primary Education
Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) that were funded by multilateral
agencies. Assessing the impact of Jomtien declaration on Indian education, Anil Sadgopal
(2006) shows how it changed the very language and tenor of educational planning in India,
given that “the new orientation guided educational planning throughout 1990s sidelining the
Indian planning commission. This marked the beginning of a phase of steady erosion of
parliament’s role in policy formulation in education as well as of the Planning commission
and the ministry of human resource development for formulating the agenda of Indian
education and setting its priorities.” (Sadgopal, 2006: 109). Following Jomtien, a number of
international and domestic NGOs, foundations and bilateral agencies became actively
involved in primary education, as part of the ‘social safety net’ that was devised to offset the
disastrous effects of structural adjustment programs.

The earlier policy framework of heavily centralized management of education in
India was recast in favor of an increasing decentralized character. Interestingly, primary
education became prioritized over mass-literacy campaigns, early education and until
recently, secondary education. The visible changes in education policy beginning 1990s also
coincide with the formal direction toward economic liberalization in India. Thus, the emergence of diasporic advocacy and action networks around the same time speaks to the policy changes as well as India’s renewed engagement with global capital. As shown in chapter 5 the three organizations discussed here have different degrees of transnational involvement. While Asha’s work involves around remittances, Ekal and Pratham have been able to carry out their own projects. The participation of diasporic organizations in such varied ways is illustrative of the reorganization of education sector to make use of the transnational flows of capital.

The phenomenon known as ‘NGOization of development’ signals a steady growth of non-governmental organizations occurred over the past few years in most of the third world. NGOization became part of the new common sense on the part of the states that viewed them as cost-effective mechanisms to render services to the poor (Meyer, 1992; Vivian, 1994). As the non-state actors combined public services with private action, the role of the state was understood to be the enabler of private enterprise. NGOs were also instrumental in pushing the idea that ‘good’ governance, stability and consensus were essential for a healthy economy. As a result, they actively took on the process of ‘democratization’ that involved rallying civil society around values such as accountability, participation and decentralization.

The growth of non-state actors in the areas of social welfare is not limited to the countries of the third world. A dramatic increase in Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in the United States, for instance, is connected to the massive cuts in welfare budget and an increasing reliance on private enterprise to address social issues. The non profit organizations in the U.S. are (largely)registered within 501 (c) 3 model that are tax exempt and the donations made to the organizations are tax deductible. In 2007, the total number of
Non Profit Organizations in the US was 1,478,194 with nearly 2.6 trillion in total asset and was accounted for 8.11 percent of the salaries paid in the U.S. (NCCS, 2009). NPOs have generated wide-ranging interests from scholars and activists for the numerous ways in which they address issues of social importance.

An important critique of the NGO/NPO structures of social action is offered by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence collective that analyzes the ‘Non-Profit Industrial Complex’ in the context of independent, progressive visions of change in the United States. This text is compelling for many reasons. It presents a clear and sustained engagement with the ways the non-profit sector has mainstreamed capitalist solutions to social problems. Following INCITE’s line of critique, it is possible to look at the practices of diasporic organizations as part of resolving social problems in capitalist ways.

In my interview transcripts with members of Asha, Ekal and Pratham, they were found negotiating their priorities and goals with respect to their accountability to donors, especially big corporations and foundations. Similarly, the production of an ‘apolitical’ stance, often bound them to considering the singular vision of funding as an all-cure. For the three groups the articulation of the issues deserving of action and their responses are both worked out within the tenets of non-profit system. Extending the INCITE critique of non-profit actions, the following considerations are relevant in thinking about diasporic actions. First, the non-profit and NGO-led interventions professionalize the process of social change and effectively manage to reduce the importance of popular, mass-based struggles that have been traditionally associated with social change. Second, NGOs/NPOs in the developing world are financially better resourced and covered than the small, independent groups. This gives the NGOs disproportionate power and advantages to selectively promote causes,
establish agenda and provide expertise. Third, by accepting corporate donations and working within the framework of corporate social responsibility, the NGOs in fact help erase the effect of radical organizing. Finally, quick fixing the problems becomes a priority over reflection, analysis and critique and as a result, the NGO/NPO formats rarely engage with larger structural issues.

Andrea Smith (2007) discusses the disciplinary apparatus of the state and the role of NPOs therein by stating that non-profit industrial complex protects capitalist interests on the one hand and serves the state in (a) monitoring and controlling social justice movements, (b) diverting public funds into private hands via foundations, (c) propagating career based modes of organizing, (d) participating in corporate defined acts of ‘social responsibility, and (e) encouraging social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures

**Political Economy of Participation**

Participation has been at the center of the debates surrounding development, public actions, and institutional change. Working within the existing frames of political protests, social justice organizations and progressive social movements have had a rich engagement with radical approaches to participation, often confronting the state on the extent of ‘publicness’ of resources and information. MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan/ Organization for the Empowerment of Peasants and Workers) is one such organization in the Indian state of Rajasthan that has been involved in pushing for progressive articulations of public participation. MKSS’ membership consists of poor and landless peasants who began their collective work in the 1980s by exposing how the government assistance for rural development and relief never reached the poor. Since then, the collective has launched many
public campaigns on resource discrepancy, rural employment and democratic
decentralization. The most popular and effective participatory political campaigns led by
MKSS include organizing public hearing on the performance of local government officers
and a decade-long campaign on rural employment guarantee.

The meaning and practices of participation, however, are different for the
international donor industry. The history of how ‘participation’ became incorporated into the
mainstream development discourse is very interesting. The World Bank’s structural
adjustment policies led to a host of negative effects in the third world; in particular these
policies reduced people’s access to essential services, and to offset these effects the World
Bank and IMF carried out social safety net programs. These approaches met with severe
criticism for being undemocratic and token ways to address the disastrous effects on the
poor. To complicate the matters, the World Bank’s decision-making process was neither
open not shared, even with the national governments and Southern NGOs that the Bank
collaborated with. The governments in the South began to demand for an access to the
Bank’s decision making since they were being pressured by the citizenry. The important
question here was why should the poorest countries repay debts without the knowledge of
their citizens. Under these circumstances, the architecture of development mechanisms
changed to include participatory components. It manifests most clearly in the Poverty
Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that were designed through “a participatory process
involving domestic stakeholders and external development partners, including the IMF and
the World Bank.” (World Bank, 1999).

The role of ‘participation’ as understood by the new logics of development is
different from how it is employed by social justice organizations. The practice of
‘participatory development’ has produced a rather narrow articulation of community and civic participation, often detached from the structures of power. Within the prevalent models participatory development, Community interests and inputs are welcome as long as they go along with the agenda set by NGOs and donor agencies (Cook, 2004; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). “Whether we like it or not, ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’ and ‘consensus’ may translate as ever more effective incorporation into agendas set elsewhere. In this sense, programmes designed to bring the excluded in often result in forms of control that are more difficult to challenge, as they reduce spaces of conflict and are relatively benign and liberal” (Kothari, 2005).

In India, two prominent educational projects are funded by external donors: District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Shiksha Karmi (Community Teachers) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (the Education for All Initiative). For both these projects, community participation has become shorthand for contract labor and downsizing (Kumar, 2006; Tukdeo, 2009). Thus, “participatory development appears to be wholly compatible with a liberalization agenda, able to marshall poor people’s voices in support for the World Bank’s policy prescriptions” (Williams, 2004: 92).

It is crucial to analyze the language of development in the context of its history and issues of power because it has become a cover for the cosmetic and undemocratic economic logic. To reiterate the question asked earlier, how do we make sense the smaller diasporic groups that draw on the same terms and same solutions? It is not simply a matter of terminological convenience given that the terminology produced by big international actors holds power in the complex and interdependent design of the field of advocacy.
My critique of the language espoused by social action groups is its strategic gloss-over of some of the pertinent issues. First, in producing the narrative of educational needs in India, the stakeholders or publics are portrayed as homogenous, fixed and unproblematic entities. Teachers, administrators, NGOs, school boards, district units, teacher educators all are termed as ‘community’ where ‘empowerment’ is assumed to happen. (Kothari, 2008). Second, the social action groups tend to individualize the problem without engaging with the larger political structures. It draws attention away from the system that causes local problems. Finally, the acritical endorsement of World-Bank led interventions contributes to the new tyranny of development that “depoliticizes participation as it claims for openness, accountability and transparency” (93).

In addition to contributing financially, the diasporic action groups are engaged in ideological and cultural work of various kinds.

1. They legitimate the process of particular educational reforms
2. They act as intermediaries between donors/state/international agencies and the receivers
3. They engage in consensus-building tasks among the various actors involved.
4. They help further a particular understanding of solution/reform.

As I critique the import of policy ideas by the three groups, I do so acknowledging that political action is shaped by a host of contentious, even contradictory forces. Strategic alliances are formed and broken. A potential for progressive articulation and practices exists within the institutional setups and constraints. Thus my analysis does not assume that the 503 (C)3 format or a diasporic upper class composition automatically lends itself to a particular vision, strategy and approach of addressing education in India.
There is an overwhelming evidence that educational initiatives, whether undertaken by civil society actors or the state, work effectively when combined with larger social changes. The REFLECT approach of literacy generation, for instance, is aid-based, NGO-led and has been able to promote participatory educational initiatives by connecting them to the larger transformative purpose. Initiated by ActionAid in the mid 1990s REFLECT involves governmental and non governmental actors and it is broadly based on merging Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy with the current participatory norms of development. REFLECT proceeds by encouraging participants in dialogical discussions of their socioeconomic problems, and uses visual graphics to structure and depict the discussion. Other efforts of social justice oriented participatory education involve the participatory budget and Brazil and the progressive decentralization in Kerala, India.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has paid attention to the centrality of discourse in diasporic action. The emphasis on discourse is partly in order to understand how ideas move policy. Diasporic organizations hold capital and can define educational issues and solutions. Their work is also ideological in that they act as intermediaries and experts. As I analyze smaller action groups on employing similar categories to frame educational issues, it is however important to understand that these groups are not simply reproducing the policy knowledge that is manufactured by international agencies. Critical approaches to education policy and development draw attention to the ways in which the actors are imbricated in the trans/inter/sub/national networks are part of the profound contradictions that shape capitalist development as well as the changing place of education therein.

While the reception of transnational actions is beyond the scope of this project, one needs to think where the 'recipients' stand in this arrangement? How do they make sense of the
changing institutional messages? As schools have become part of the networked arrangement of various actors in education, getting ‘funds from abroad’ has become a priority. Additionally, educational changes in recent times have been most visible in the practices of classroom instruction, grading, new requirements in professional development and mandatory ICT literacy. As Indian educators have reported, a growing trend to contractualize teaching work has kept a large number of teaching force out of benefits and the education directorate has chosen to close down a number of failing public schools to cut down cost. (Sadgopal, 2006).

As the analysis of this chapter shows, there are numerous ways of engaging with education in India. An interrogation of the systemic privilege of being part of the skilled diaspora would be the necessary first step for a more progressive approach to education. In this respect, I think the diasporic organizations will be well served following the lead of radical social movements in India (and elsewhere) that continue to refuse to settle for band-aid and quick fix solutions.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

Drawing on multidisciplinary perspectives consisting of educational policy studies, diaspora, cultural studies and global/international education, this dissertation project focuses on exploring the workings of diasporic education actions. In particular, three Indian diasporic organizations are studied. The analysis of social action practices of each of the groups and their participation in the larger networks of education are both useful to understand how policy knowledge is shaped, interpreted and connected to social practice. The emergence of networks is variously described in terms of global civil society, the changed role of the state, and the changing processes of governance. (Castells, 2000; 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Locating the formation of transnational associational ties within the larger global processes involving interconnection and convergence, it is safe to state that the changed global conditions have created spaces for political opportunities and participation. As the research has shown, the rise in transnational networks has led to the formation of new structures and new ways of influencing institutions and policy production. (Alger, 1997; Khagram, 2005). The transnationalization of social action is evident in that the flows of ideas and resources now routinely cross borders.

Much has been written about the role of Indian diaspora in India’s economic growth (Friedman, 2005; Dossani, 2008; Nilekani, 2009). The heightened interactions and visibility of diaspora are taken to probe into the workings of globalization as well as the ensuing social transformation in India. The emergence of NRIs organizations and their participation in
India’s education policy making is, however, understudied. This dissertation fills the gaps as it examines the influences of diasporic actions on India’s policy production. As the work shows, the diasporic social action groups map out new tenets of transnational practices by transcending that state, yet being firmly invested in it.

Informed by a large body of interdisciplinary literature that has provided conceptual and descriptive accounts of the relationship between diaspora and the Indian state, my work has paid attention to the workings of global capitalism that have produced diasporic spaces of action, intervention and advocacy. The new social action networks, their engagements and practices are neither apolitical nor simple. While critical works in diaspora studies draw attention to the various forms of nationalism, the frameworks of critical policy studies and critical pedagogy provide tools to analyze the reforms proposed by transnational actors.

The three diasporic organizations studied in this dissertation have been part of the larger collaborative networks working on issue based campaigns such as Right to Education (RTE), but they have done so without submerging their particular politics. Thus, an organization like _Ekal_ foundation operates within the structures of non-profit organizations and forms alliances with transnational and domestic non governmental organizations around the issues of access while adhering to the _Hindutva_ vision of education as well as politics. Adding to complexity is the Indian state’s participation in seeking diasporic funds. Can the state welcome the ‘foreign exchange’ and service provision by _Ekal_ while rejecting its extremist ideology? Given such complex nuances, how do we understand the transnational from the national, and the governmental from the civic?
Diaspora, Cultural Practices and Education

My experience as an immigrant and diasporic Indian student has informed this project. Initially, I came across the various educational action networks through popular diasporan media. An initial inventory of diasporic social action groups in the U.S. showed far greater proportion of groups involved in education. As I began following the discussions of some of the groups, it became clear that they were producing and using information to connect with the NGOs in India, plan actions, fundraise and contact potential donors. Educational actions were also important in generating a sense of community among individuals who were part of these collaborative efforts. As such, a number of initiatives proposed by the Government of India, the Indian NGOs and smaller civic groups seem to suggest that the diasporic assistance was received well.

As my engagements with these groups grew, it presented an increasingly complex and layered reading of long-distance nationalism, identity production, the tenets of participation and India’s image makeover as a capital friendly place. I began my inquiry with a set of questions about diasporic action: (a) What issues are identified as most important by diasporic action groups?, (b) What cultural logics are at work, enabling organizations to fundraise for education in India?, and (c) What does educational aid from abroad mean for Indian elementary and secondary education? These questions attained complexity as I paid attention to both the popular and official discourses of Indian education. Given that the entry of skilled diasporas in India’s policy framework occurred along side a number of transformations globally as well as within India, I turned to the theoretical literature in diaspora studies, cultural studies and critical education studies. Even in their generic sense, the concepts ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ offer possibilities to understand migration,
memory and identity. Similarly, it draws attention to the common practices of resource
mobilization, information dissemination and cultural production through which diasporic
communities construct and sustain ties.

My inquiry begins by identifying the contexts in which India’s skilled diaspora have
assumed importance in its affairs. As India began realigning its policy towards diaspora to
suit larger global imperatives, the knowledge workers have come to occupy central place.
Combining the logics of diaspora-led development on the one hand and an explosion of
transnational circuits on the other helps understand the strategic place of diasporic action
groups. The data for this dissertation include policy reports produced by the Government of
India, the multilateral agencies and larger think tanks on the one hand and the information
put together by the three diasporic groups studied for this project. The latter data set include
public documents, publicity materials, web-content, participation observation, and semi
structured interviews with members of each of the group. My initial assessment of data
included approaching the materials with questions regarding specific educational work and
policy suggestions put forth by these groups as well as understanding the practices of
fundraising and collaboration. The data and narratives led to a set of themes that were used in
analysis and interpretation.

In what follows I discuss some of the findings and lasting impressions of the research.
First, moving away from the fixed and model-based approaches to policy analysis, this
dissertation has highlighted the need to pay attention to processes and practices in studying
policy. Much of the policy research on Indian education has been state-centered. Informed by
global reality of multiple, horizontal and vertical networks that shape policy, this work
recognizes that the diasporic involvement in educational projects in India needs to be understood along with its cultural, ideological and historical dimensions.

Second, the interventions by smaller actors such as the ones studied in this project have not been researched sufficiently. While the supra national actors continue to dominate the policy and scholarly spaces, this research draws attention to the in-between and peer-networked interjections in education. As the analysis shows diasporic networks are significant sources of financial flows and their interventions make for interesting readings about the pressures and changes in Indian policy.

In understanding policy changes as processes, the project has sought to include the various levels of analysis. A confluence of macro meso and micro levels of analysis is relevant to view how policy messages about education move between official/popular/institutional domains. As shown in chapters 5 and 6, the diasporic groups negotiate their educational actions within the available structures and on the agreed-upon tenets of larger alliance on the one hand, and develop their own, distinct take on Indian education policy on the other. Thus, these smaller diasporic groups are not simply mirroring the policy knowledge produced by multilateral agencies or the state, but they are creating new practices, spaces and modes that influence policy.

Fourth, the data show that both India and diaspora are discursively produced in the process of transnational action. This dissertation focuses on the ways in which diaspora and the state share a mutually constitutive relationship. In particular, one of the questions the dissertation engages is the state’s strategic propinquity with skilled diaspora. Critical analysis of the discourse and practices of diasporic groups leads us to examine the forces that most visibly affect the agenda of social action. Discourse-based analysis also allows to probe into
the commonsensical terms that are espoused by a number of actors in education. As this dissertation shows, the financial interventions by diasporic groups are also connected to their functions as cultural and ideological intermediaries. From the data gathered, the research looks at how certain issues are taken up by educational action groups, often ignoring some of the pertinent and relevant ones. As pointed out in the analysis, this selection is not accidental, but is instead governed by two factors: the structures of on-profit/non-governmental setup and the politics of producing quick-fix solutions.

**Significance and Future Research**

This research contributes to the existing scholarship in educational policy and diaspora studies. This work is built on exploring the ways in education policy processes are being increasingly influenced by the larger economic imperatives. Skilled diasporic interventions have become central to the policy reorienting efforts by the third world states that are increasingly aligning their policy to suit the global imperatives.

A large body of research on Indian diaspora has focused on its participation in home grown social movements, activism, philanthropy and recently, the outsourcing operations. Indian diasporic engagements in education have not been explored sufficiently. This work draws attention to the connections between transnational flows, cultural logics of diasporic actions and the politics of education.

My work has focused on one aspect of transnational educational action. The reception and interpretation of financial and cultural flows from diaspora is crucial to understand how the transnational messages are negotiated and whether they help diffuse the centers of power. The informal reaction of the elementary school teacher cited earlier is instructive of the
number of changes the teachers and administrators are negotiating. Further research is needed to understand what teachers think of India’s education policy shift. How do they respond to the redefinition of their professional life that now includes decentralized management and an inclusion of various NGOs? These and other questions need to be addressed in order to gain a better understanding of trans/national actions in education.
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Appendix A

Human Subjects Research Document

November 2007

Dear Madam/Sir

I am a research student in educational policy at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I am currently working on Indian diasporic networks that are active in the field of education. My research is carried out under the advisement of Professor Antonia Darder.

I decided to write to you since you are listed as one of the contacts on the website of your organization. I would like to select your organization in this case study research. I will be looking at the involvement of your organization toward supporting educational endeavors in India. For this purpose, I will look at the projects that have been funded by your organization.

I would first like to ask you if you would be willing to participate in an interview concerning your organization. Secondly, could you recommend the informational materials including brochures, publicity fliers of your organization? Finally, if you know any persons that may be helpful in gaining insight into the project can you please forward my request to them? If you agree to an interview I will contact you later this year. Thank you for your willingness to assist me and for considering my request.

Best,

Shivali Tukdeo
Department of Educational Policy
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
1310 S Sixth Street
Champaign USA 61820
tukdeo@uiuc.edu
phone: 217 333 2858
fax: 217 244 7064
Appendix B

Participant Consent Letter

March 2008

Dear Madam/Sir:

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Education & the Transnational Space: A Case of Diasporic Indian Organizations in the US”. The project will be carried out by Shivali Tukdeo and Professor Antonia Darder, department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In this project, Shivali Tukdeo will interview a total of 8 participants at the Asha Biennial Conference. Each interview will last for about 15 minutes. The interviews will be audio-taped with your permission. You will be asked about your experience with the organization. The audiotapes and all the information will be kept secure. The audiotapes will be transcribed and coded to remove individual’s names and will be erased after the completion of the project.

We do not anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life and we anticipate that the results will increase our understanding of the role of the diaspora toward the policy formation of elementary education in India. The results of this study may be used for a dissertation, a scholarly report, a journal article and conference presentation. In any publication or public presentation pseudonyms will be substituted for any identifying information.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. You are also free to refuse to
answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You will receive a copy of the research results after this project is completed.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact Shivali Tukdeo by email [tukdeo@uiuc.edu] or by phone [503-867-1284], or Prof. Antonia Darder at (217) 333-9865 or [adarder@uiuc.edu].

Sincerely,

Shivali Tukdeo

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature                          Date
## Appendix C

### Research Design

<table>
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| Organizations               | Asha, Vibha Dishaà → Dec  
|                             | Ekal, Pratham, ILP → Jan                                                                                                             |
| Interviews/Observations; formal/informal | Leaders of particular chapters; organizers; Fundraising events; Meetings; Brainstorming sessions                                      |
| Documents                   | Informational materials; meeting minutes                                                                                                |
Appendix D

Asha For Education: Account Summary

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Appendix E

Ekal Vidyalaya, USA: Account Summary

Total Assets: $1,742,673

ASSETS

- Cash and Cash Equivalents $1,472,570 (85%)
- Plant and Equipment $21,510 (1%)
- Investments $245,126 (14%)
- Prepaid Expense $3,467 (< 1%)

Total Assets: $1,742,673

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

- Temporarily Restricted (Net Asset) $833,900 (48%)
- Unrestricted (Net Asset) $902,486 (52%)
- Accrued Expense (Current Liability) $6,287 (< 1%)

Total Liabilities and Net assets: $1,742,673
Appendix F

Pratham: Account Summary

Pratham tracks expenditures and activities with verification at multiple levels, providing a continuous chain of accountability up from the grass-roots. An independent Chartered Accountant (CA) conducts a quarterly review, including a review of statutory compliance, program data, internal controls and reports. A CA firm carries out the annual statutory audit.

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**Pratham annual revenues (in '000), 2003-04 to 2007-08**

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Pratham: Sources of Funds

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[Graph showing sources of funds]

Maj or US Foundations: 39%
Other Pratham USA Donations: 18%
Indian Corporates: 12%
Indian Government Agencies: 11%
ND/IB: 10%
Pratham UK: 5%
Others: 5%