

Cultural Transmission and Intergenerational Relations Among Female Immigrants: Family Structure and Social Integration of South Asian Women in the UK

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate dynamics of cultural transmission and intergenerational relations among South Asian women in the UK, focusing on how these factors influence family structure and social integration. As primary agents of cultural preservation, South Asian women play a dual role in maintaining traditional values within their families while navigating the complexities of adapting to a new cultural environment. The paper examines the processes of cultural transmission, highlighting the role of language, religious practices, and familial values in fostering cultural continuity. It further delves into the intergenerational dynamics that emerge as younger generations adopt the host society's norms, often leading to conflicts and negotiations within the family. Additionally, the role of community organizations is analyzed, showcasing their pivotal contribution to social integration by providing support systems and resources tailored to immigrant women. The findings emphasize the resilience and adaptability of South Asian women, whose experiences underline the importance of inclusive policies and initiatives that support cultural diversity and integration. By integrating qualitative insights with visual data representations, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by South Asian women in the UK.

Keywords: cultural transmission, intergenerational relations, social integration, community organizations

1. Introduction

It has always been a transformation in the life of the people, their families, and the generally accepted ways of the community at large where one traces one's origin. For South Asian women migrating to the UK, it brings along an entirely new set of challenges and opportunities as part of a delicate balancing act between cultural

preservation and assimilation into a vastly different socio-cultural system. These women often become the custodians of their heritage, bears of the responsibility both to transmit the cultural values, traditions, and practices of successive generations while adapting themselves to the norms and expectations of British society. It puts them right into the heart

of intergenerational dynamics, where family structure and relations become a pivotal point.

Deep-seated cultural values form the bedrock of a close intergenerational relationship within South Asian immigrant families, in which respect for elders, collective decision processes, and traditional gender expectations all play their part. As younger generations begin to experience norms very different from those of their parents' generation, these family dynamics are liable to change, sometimes in painful ways that are negotiated within families. These systemic barriers, coupled with discrimination and limited resource availability, further complicate the hegemonized expectations that run in conflict with their cultural identity. This paper explores how cultural transmission forms a complex process that shapes the evolving

nature of intergenerational relations, hence affecting the social integration of South-Asian women in the UK.

2. Cultural Transmission Within South Asian Families

Cultural transmission is an intergenerational process in which values, beliefs, customs, and traditions are passed on within the family. In the case of the UK-based South Asian immigrant families, it is also an important way to hold onto an identity and a sense of continuity in a foreign setting. South Asian women are viewed massively as the cultural gatekeepers and are an integral part of passing on the cultural knowledge and ways to the younger generation, promoting a dual identity that incorporates both the heritage and the adoption of the British way of life.

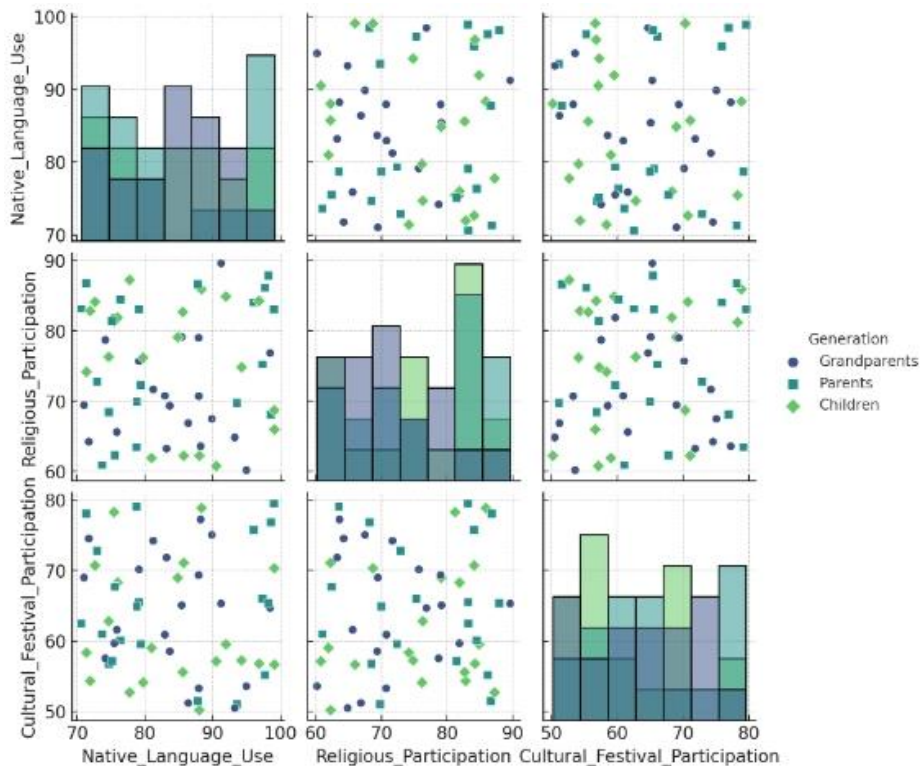


Figure 1. Cultural metrics by generation

Language is indeed related to the transmission of culture, properly attached in practical and symbolic ways to the roots of such culture. It is very common for the mothers and grandmothers within South Asian households to make it a point to emphasize speaking in the mother tongue, such as Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, or Bengali, to encourage bilingualism in their children. This, in turn, will help them be able to

communicate within the family and help them connect with their heritage and grow closer to their roots. Bilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and enables pride in ethnicity.

Religious and spiritual practices also play an important role. South Asian women typically head families with religious devotions, festivals, and community worship. The Sikh family may hold weekly prayer at the gurdwara, but for the

Muslim family, every day is important in prayer and fasting during Ramadan. A Hindu family meets to celebrate Diwali, which expresses by new, local interpretations a centuries-old tradition. Such activities foster feelings of belonging within the community while reinforcing spiritual and moral commitments. Cultural transmission goes beyond explicit practices to include subtle behavioral norms and values such as reverence for elders, collectivism, and gender roles. These are passed to children through the spoken word of everyday interaction, moral instructions, and storytelling by women. Living under globalization and assimilation pressures, South Asian women struggle to maintain a balance between their efforts to retain and mold ethnic culture to fit the broader social context in which they find themselves.

3. Intergenerational Relations and Family

Structure

One of the most important aspects of the South Asian immigrant community is its family structure, usually a collectivist framework in which the needs of the family unit are placed above the needs and desires of an individual. This collectivism manifests through the prevalence of extended family systems where generations such as grandparents, parents, and children co-reside or maintain proximity and frequented interaction. Such a structure is important with regard to both emotional and practical support, which new immigrants may be in dire need of due to the socio-economic problems they are experiencing in living in the UK. In such a setting, grandparents usually provide an important role in terms of being the custodian of culture by ensuring customs, languages, and values are passed on.

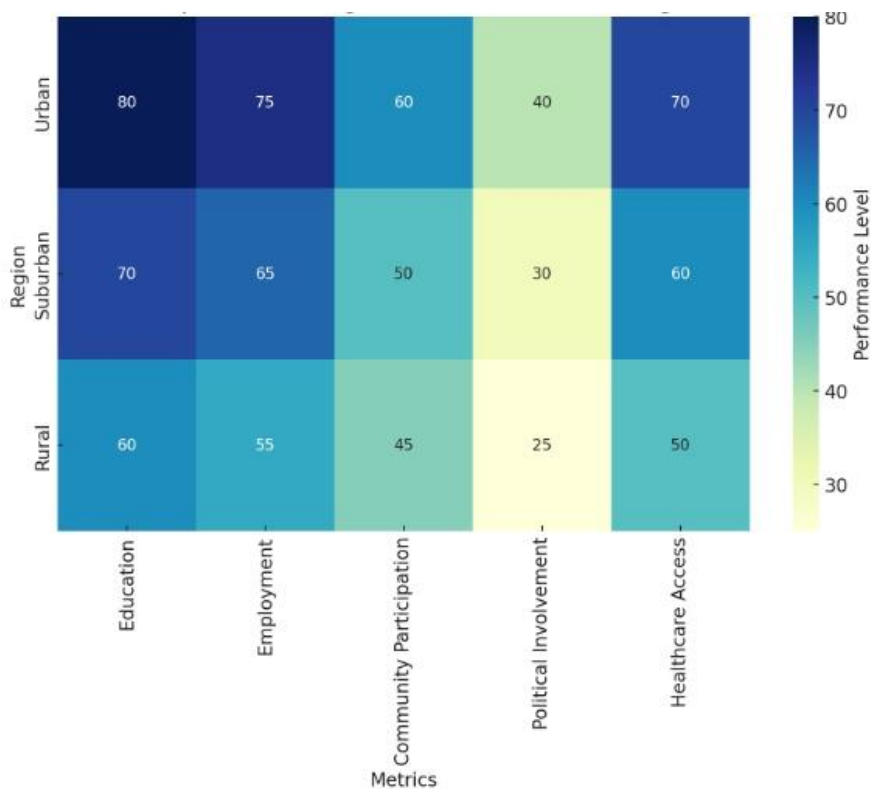


Figure 2. Social integration metrics across regions

In such families, this dynamic is not without its intergenerational complexities. In particular, the young women are socialized through education, job opportunities, and colleagues into the values and lifestyle of the host society. These quite often clash with the traditional expectations, thus forming generationally specific tensions. For example, the South Asian young women

may reject or question the traditional gender roles by pursuing higher education and professional careers rather than adhering to early marriage and homemaking expectations. While such aspirations represent empowerment and socio-economic mobility, they may be seen by older family members as a deviation from cultural norms, leading to friction within the

family.

Grandparents usually play significant roles in decision-making and are more resistant to changes that seemingly pose a threat to their cultural identity. They require arranged marriages, uphold religious tradition, and have ascribed gender roles. From their point of view, this will maintain family harmony and ensure the perpetuation of their culture. To their children and grandchildren, however, they may see these mores as binding or even irretrievable as they strive to balance recognizing family tradition with the pursuit of individual aspiration. The dynamic relationship among these elements may therefore yield a range of possible outcomes: in some families, one may find open communication and mutual respect, allowing a negotiated balance whereby traditional values are fitted into the context of modern British society; in others, generational divides may deepen, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts which strain familial relationships. For example, the question of lifestyle, such as dating or living alone, can create friction and challenge the strength of intergenerational ties.

These tensions are poignantly underlined by the evolving roles of South Asian women, whose increasing economic and social responsibilities frequently throw them into the positions of mediator between the older and younger generations, pressing for change while trying to preserve familial cohesion. It is this duality in their roles-as cultural transmitters and agents of

integration-that places them uniquely in the course of negotiating these intergenerational challenges.

Despite these conflicts, there are also benefits provided by this collectivist family structure: it offers a support system, especially in cases of financial hardship, illness, or childcare concerns. Sharing responsibilities, as operative in the extended family setup presently, can create a feeling of belonging and interdependence that can mitigate some alienating forces of migration. In that respect, intergenerational relations in South Asian families in the UK are dynamic and in constant evolution. They reflect the greater struggles of immigrant communities to get adjusted with the new environment while trying to preserve their cultural identity. How successful these families will be in such a challenge is related to the amount of dialogue, flexibility, and common points that could be established between tradition and modernity.

4. Social Integration and the Role of South Asian Women

Social integration is a process that positively involves all immigrants in social, economic, and political life on a daily basis. Thus, it becomes a challenge for South Asian women within the UK as they try to strike a balance between cultural preservation and adaptation within British societal norms. More often than not, their process of integration occurs within contexts defined by dualities—that is, rooted in specific cultural heritage but also sensitive to parts of the host culture.

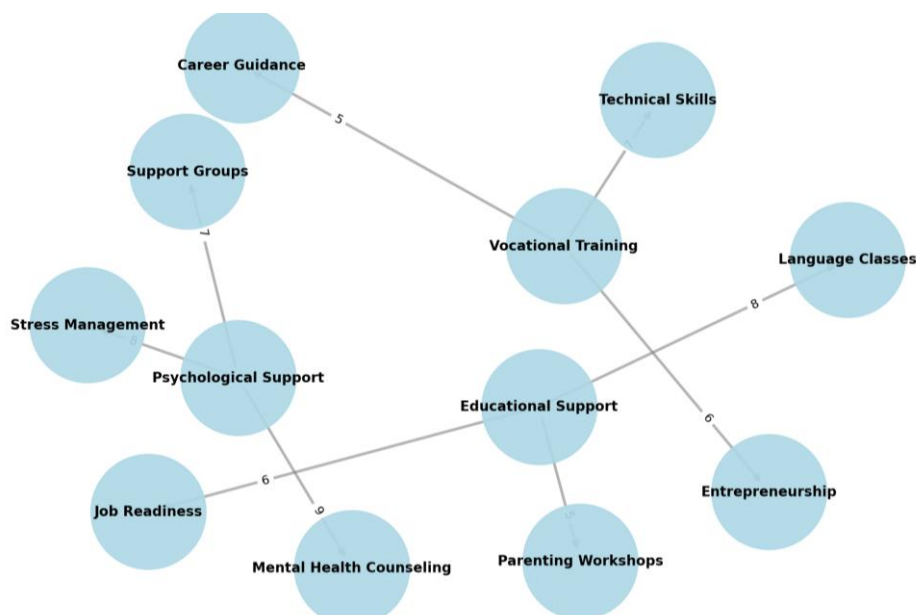


Figure 3. Network diagram: community organization activities and participant needs

Community involvement is one of the main instruments of social integration. South Asian women are often active in local organizations, cultural groups, and religious institutions that provide mutual support and serve as a base for wider social participation. Spaces of active mutual support allow women to share their experiences, gain access to resources, and be recognized for their contributions to community life—a sense of belonging with maintenance of cultural identity. For instance, the participation of members in community centers that have language classes, vocational training, or cultural festivals creates an intense attachment to their heritage and the greater society.

Education acts as an integrating agent. Younger generations of South Asian women are pursuing higher education, and this not only gives them more diverse career opportunities but also opens up different perspectives and social networks beyond the community. They become melting pots of universities and colleges where these women negotiate their identities through complex blends of traditional values with modern aspirations. It equips them with the right kind of skills and confidence to thrive in this work environment, to pursue their rights, and not be victims of stereotypes.

Employment is another vital element of social integration. For many South Asian women, entry into the work environment means much more than economic liberty; it opens one gate toward greater social integration. Work opportunity entails changes to encounter various people from various backgrounds, and this transcends differences in cultures. Through these contacts, South Asian women themselves take an active role in forming an inclusive society and combating discriminatory ideas about the role immigrants ought to play in society. But then again, the road to integration is not a smooth, easy track. The percentages of gender and ethnicity-based discrimination and prejudice are stubbornly ranged at alarming levels. South Asian women have to bear, within the expectation of their own society, a “double burden”: as immigrants, they have to face the biases of the host society; as women, the traditionalistic expectations in their communities. For instance, job workplace discrimination may limit opportunities in professional growth, whereas family expectations put them under additional burdens in caregiving and household management.

The navigation of dual expectations can also create internal conflicts; for instance, while many South Asian women are grateful for the independence and opportunities British society is affording them, at the same time, they may be disposed to take up traditional roles—for example, putting family first and personal aspirations last. This tension thus creates struggles of identity whereby the motivation to integrate is moderated by the apprehension of losing one’s cultural identity.

Yet, despite all of these challenges, the experience of South Asian women in the UK has essentially been one of their steady resilience and adaptability. Many successfully navigate their dual identities to utilize their privileged positions as cultural bridges between their communities and wider society. Their contributions extend beyond their immediate circles of family and community to add cultural diversity, professional expertise, and civic participation to British society as a whole. Integration is a continuing dynamic process for South Asian women in British society. It advances their lives in all areas - education, employment, and community life - and contributes to more coherent and inclusive societies. The challenges they experience point to the need for supportive policies and initiatives for integration that respect and value cultural diversity.

5. The Role of Community Organizations

The community organization provides the right support for the integration journey of South Asian women both with practical help and a feeling of belonging. Such organizations often work as a liaison between the immigrant communities and the greater society in overcoming some challenges peculiar to their status while helping women negotiate their dual identities. Community organizations are also some of the biggest contributors in terms of language support, since language is very often the most prominent barrier to service access, employment, and greater society engagement for South Asian women. Many organizations provide adult-oriented language courses that enable them to become proficient in communication supplies related to daily life and the workplace. More than acquiring language, classes instill confidence in women to participate in the wider social sphere.

Many community organizations are also on the

front line in preserving and celebrating culture. By organizing various cultural events-such as traditional festivals, art exhibitions, and cooking workshops-these groups provide spaces in which South Asian women can celebrate their heritage. Such activities not only reinforce cultural pride in themselves but also serve as opportunities for the wider community to learn and appreciate the richness of South Asian traditions. The result of such an exchange is cross-cultural understanding that reduces prejudice and promotes inclusivity.

Community organizations deal with the issues of social and economic empowerment by conducting workshops on job readiness, entrepreneurship training, and financial literacy. For instance, vocational training in tailoring, catering, or information technology will enable women to develop skills that lead to income generation and economic independence. Some community organizations have mentorship programs whereby a professional can be assigned to a South Asian woman to advise her in career choices and challenges at the workplace.

The other essential work of these organizations is in the domain of mental and emotional health. Migration can be a lonely business, combined with tensions between retaining perceived traditional expectations and modern-day roles. With this, there are counseling services, support groups, and safe places provided by numerous community organizations throughout the world for sharing and looking for answers. Such initiatives help counteract feelings of loneliness and strengthen resilience, as well as a stirring of community solidarity.

Besides, they work for changes in policies and social justice. These organizations become the collective voices of South Asian women, highlighting issues related to domestic violence, discrimination, and healthcare disparities. They must work in collaboration with local authorities and policy framers for less restrictive policies that would address immigrant women's needs.

The community organizations, therefore, facilitate integration multidimensionally in essential service provision, in pride for their culture, and in economic and social empowerment of South Asian women. They fill the gap in the immigrant community's interaction with wider society, hence an illustration of a more cohesive inclusive

environment.

6. Conclusion

Intergenerational transmission of culture and relationships is key to the role and position of South Asian women in the UK, who are dominant in the family nexus and pathways of integration into society. Standing at the juncture of tradition and modernity, these women bear an important responsibility: they have to preserve cultural heritage while striving to adapt themselves to the societal norms of their host country. This positions them to be cultural custodians and agents of change, impinging on immediate family structures and having greater ramifications with respect to the community and society in general.

The balancing act involves the centrality of the family in passing down language, values, and traditions. However, this often creates intergenerational tension as the younger generations embrace modern values that contrast with traditional expectations. Most South Asian families work out these differences through open dialogue and mutual understanding, finding a way to marry elements of both cultures into hybrid identities reflective of their migration experiences.

Beyond the family unit, community organization plays an important role for the integration support and aid that is necessary for South Asian women in their new society. The ability of community organizations to instill pride in cultural heritage, deliver much-needed resources, and facilitate the active participation of women in social and economic life. They are also powerful advocates in the realm of immigration rights as they seek to create an environment that honors cultural diversity rather than marginalizes it.

South Asian women in the UK are, therefore, mute expressions of the interplay between cultural preservation and social integration. Their resiliency and adaptability hint at the inclusivist policies and initiatives which need to be designed to help them sustain their dual identity. These women continue to contribute to the multicultural fabric of British society, showing the ability of immigrant communities to grow and diversify the cultural landscape of a host country. Recognizing and addressing their unique challenges is essential for fostering a truly inclusive and cohesive society.

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