



# South Asian Immigrant Businesses in Somerville

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- Somerville Community Corporation, for providing my class with resources and assistance for making contacts in Somerville.
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### **Class and Project Description**

Urban Borderlands is a public anthropology class taught by Professor Deborah Pacini at Tufts University. Public anthropology aims to address problems beyond the academic discipline, into creating social change. The class is unique in itself as students do readings but conduct the bulk of their learning in the field, exploring areas in east Somerville. Within the class, students this semester conducted field work in Union Square, Magoun Square, Ball Square, and other areas that will be affected by the expansion of the MBTA Green Line. Traditionally, the class has focused on Latino communities in Somerville; this year, however, the projects expanded to various businesses and churches within the community, across many different ethnic groups.

The class has a few objectives. First, Urban Borderlands is meant to provide students with hands-on experience through field work and interviews. Secondly, this information is shared with the Tufts University Digital Collections and Archives and the Somerville Community Corporation. The Somerville Community Corporation “is dedicated to maintaining diversity and preserving affordability in Somerville by building and preserving housing, organizing for necessary policies and funding, and giving residents the financial skills they need to survive” (“Somerville Community Corporation”). The purposes of sharing the project with the Tufts University Digital Collections and Archives is to contribute to the wealth of public history that already exists. Sharing this information with the Somerville Community Corporation will allow the organization to better advocate for community members, gain a better understanding of the lives of immigrants, and also provide a face to the community.

### **Why South Asians?**

“The concept of the borderlands... is rooted in the slippery social landscape created by transnational capitalism and migration” (Behar 1993:15). Ruth Behar stated this most aptly when describing the interaction between cultures and the lives of those in a fluid culture. The immigrants within this report are a part of this borderland world. Though Somerville itself is not physically on the border with another country, Somerville has served for many years as meeting place of cultures, with many immigrants settling in the city with their families.

One of the most interesting emerging communities in Somerville is the Asian community. Walk around Union Square and you'll see Indian markets, Chinese restaurants, specialty Asian markets, and more. Asian owned businesses make up 6.6% of the businesses in Somerville (“Somerville (city) QuickFacts”). In contrast, 6.4% of the population of Somerville is Asian. From this it can be seen that the proportion of Asians represented in the economic life of Somerville is rather high. This is not even taking into account the number of Asians working in these businesses; many go on to work as waiters in restaurants and are hired by their comrades.

Somerville has traditionally been known for its Brazilian and Latino populations. In this paper I hope to present a look at another community that has been quietly growing over the past twenty years- the South Asian community. Though the Indian presence has begun to be noticed more, there is also a richness in the Nepalese and Pakistani communities that is being overlooked. The South Asian immigrants have come to cities like Somerville, created their own community and economic spaces, and have observed remarkable success in their integration. On the other hand, there are still problems that these immigrants occur, which may happen in the form of language barriers and financial difficulties.

Based off my interviews conducted with South Asian business owners and managers, I hope to offer a perspective as to what draws certain immigrant groups to Somerville, how these businesses appropriate aspects of their culture to create social and cultural spheres within the space of their business, and portray how these businesses have contributed to the diversity and economic success of Union Square. This topic is of an utmost crucial one, as these businesses may be affected by the expansion of the Green Line. If these businesses are negatively affected, they may be at a risk of closing, causing Union Square to lose some of its cultural vibrancy as a result. I hoped to learn more about the perspective of an immigrant running a business in Somerville.

### **Research Parameters and Methodology**

As a child born to immigrant parents who came to the United States on student visas, I have been intimately tied to the immigrant community my whole life. My parents are the cliché American success story; they grew up poor, moved to New York City to get an education, worked three jobs every day, even in the years after I was born, and are now successful in a way their childhood selves could have never imagined.

My interest in Asian immigrants comes from this. Traditionally, Somerville has been well known for its Latino communities. However there is a growing presence in Somerville, especially with the South Asians. Indians own many restaurants in the area, and it is not uncommon to see Nepalese businesses. An East Asian representation can also be seen through Korean and Chinese owned businesses.

As I saw within the immigrant community I personally grew up in, immigrant communities often gather and eventually create social and economic spaces that can meet the

needs of their communities. When my parents moved to Queens, New York, in 1984, the Chinese immigrant community was just beginning to grow. Over the past 25 years, Chinese restaurants and supermarkets grew in abundance in the area. In addition, the Chinese immigrants opened up weekend Chinese schools to ensure that their children would learn the language and culture in the most cross-cultural of settings. In 2010, if one goes to certain areas of Queens, it is difficult to find anything written in English; everything is in Chinese. The roots for the Chinese immigrant community in Queens was laid in the first immigrants and businesses that opened there.

Somerville fascinates me because in Somerville, I see a lot of these changes happening within the South Asian communities. I hoped to be able to examine the formation of these communities in their early stages and also learn about how these communities came to be.

Ultimately, due to certain challenges I encountered in my research, I found myself focusing more on South Asian-owned businesses than Asian-owned businesses overall. Due to the busy schedules of many business owners, I was unable to obtain interviews with many of the East Asian businesses. Eventually, I found that a majority of my interactions with Somerville businesses were with South Asian ones. While this wasn't my original purpose, narrowing my focus has allowed me to look more at historical contexts and culture, and delve further into networks that have developed among the Nepalese. Through my study of the South Asian community, I hoped to better understand several things. My research and interview objectives were as follows:

- To understand how businesses run by South Asian immigrants in Union Square play not just a role in the economic sphere, but also a role in the social and cultural spheres that make up the Somerville community. This topic is of an utmost crucial one, as these

businesses contribute to the diversity and economic success of Union Square, and may be negatively affected by the expansion of the Green Line through raised rents. If this is the case, these businesses are at risk of closing and the cultural uniqueness of Union Square may be lost as a result.

- To learn the narrator's experiences and challenges from working in Union Square, along with how his experiences as an immigrant provide him with a unique perspective and networks.

Over the course of my research, I visited owners at their businesses. This was not always an easy task, as many business owners do not actually work at their businesses full-time. A few times, I interviewed managers or business partners. However, I feel that this adds to the multi-layered complexity of running a business and allowed me to gain a better understanding of the breakdown of labor. I also had a few informal conversations that were unrecorded for various reasons, which I will refer to in this paper.

Interviews were held at the businesses. Given that many of these involved service industries of some sort, I would often have to pause the interviews for the interviewee to attend to a customer. However, in listening to the sound clips I still feel that I was able to gain a coherent interview in almost all instances.

The problem of time constraints and difficulties with scheduling was another issue. As a student with my own busy schedule, it was often difficult to coordinate with business owners, who were even busier than myself. Given the time constraints of the research and the class, I also did not have the opportunity to conduct as many interviews or spend as much time in the field as I would have liked. Therefore, all I can say is that this is my attempt to begin to show a glimmer of just what life is like for immigrant business owners.



Of course, I believe it is important as an anthropologist to also acknowledge the role I have played in my research. As the interviewer I controlled the course of conversation and the questions that were asked and though one interviewee went above and beyond to insert his own ideas and thoughts, I was unable to build up that same rapport with most of my interviewees due to time constraints.

Ruth Behar states in her book Translated Woman, “Clearly, any ethnographic representation- and I count my own, of course- inevitably includes a self-representation. Even more subtly, the act of representing ‘almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation,’ using as it must some degree of reduction, decontextualization, and miniaturization” (1993:271). One of the most difficult things about anthropology is to be able to enter in, remove one’s own biases and expectations, and avoid probing questions that direct the interviewee to answer in a certain way. I certainly worked to avoid this, and I feel I was able to do this to some success. For example, I began my research looking to understand social networks and how these businesses served as social and cultural gathering places. This began to evolve due to the responses my interviewees gave me, and I have to respond accordingly.

Besides for the formal recorded interviews, I also had a few informal conversations with business owners and a member of the Somerville community. These provided some insight into how the Nepalese community came to be along with providing me with a better understanding of the cultural interactions that go on in these businesses. In many ways, my informal conversations, away from the invasive presence of a voice recorder, allowed for much more relaxed and open conversation that I was able to more easily internalize.

## **Narrators**

**L.B. Ayer-** L.B. Ayer arrived in the United States in 2003 from Nepal. When he first arrived, he worked as a server in a different restaurant. Then, L.B. began working as a manager at India Palace in 2008. He has many family members and relatives living in the Boston area.

**Laxmi Pradhan-** Laxmi Pradhan is originally from Kathmandu in Nepal. As a boy, he attended a Catholic school in Nepal called St. Xavier's. He has a business background, having traveled extensively out of Nepal for his work before moving to the United States in 1999. Middle aged in either his forties or fifties, Pradhan is married with two sons. The first year he was in the United States, he lived in Michigan. He then moved to Boston in 2000 and has lived in Somerville ever since. Once he arrived, he started with his son several businesses- now, they run a real estate company, a few rental apartments, and run the Subway/Union Mart store in Union Square. They are in the process of opening a new Indian/Nepalese fusion restaurant in Teele Square within the next few months. Pradhan hopes to return to Nepal in the future. Overall, he is a well respected member of the community who has considerable influence and has seen much of the development of Union Square.

**Shiva Sharma-** Shiva Raj Sharma is an immigrant from Nepal. He is 41 years old and is married. He has two children, boys, ages 10 and 14, who are still in Nepal but will be arriving in the United States in a few months. Shiva has a business background, having run a factory in Nepal for almost ten years. He is originally from the Chitwan District, about 100 miles from Kathmandu. Shiva has a master's degree in commerce. Sharma moved to the United States in

2003, established a company in New York, but then closed it in 2004. He moved to Boston in 2005 at the urging of his sister and has lived here ever since. Having worked in a grocery store, Subway, and a CVS in Cambridge, he started New Market in January 2010, where he is currently working.

**Alex Ahmed-** Alex is a Pakistani man in his mid to late thirties. He is originally from Karachi, the capital of Pakistan. In Pakistan, Alex received an Masters in Public Administration. In 2001, Alex left Pakistan and came to the United States to get an Masters in Business Administration in New York City. He moved to Boston in 2005, where he proceeded to start and own several different businesses until his current job.

### **The History of the Green Line**

The Green Line extension project has been studied and considered for over forty years (“Project History”). Though it has been repeatedly put off, the state is legally required to complete the Green Line by 2014 because it is a part of a list of improvements that “it pledged to offset environmental impacts of the Big Dig, comply with the federal Clean Air Act, and avoid a lawsuit from the Conservation Law Foundation” (Moskowitz) The Big Dig, also known as the Central Artery/Tunnel Project is “recognized as the largest, most complex, and technologically challenging highway project in the history of the United States” (“The Central Artery/Tunnel Project – The Big Dig”).

While we can only speculate as to what exactly the effects of the Green Line will be, examining the history of Davis Square provides us some insight into this. In 1985, the Red Line was extended into Davis Square, bringing with it changes to the neighborhood and significant gentrification (Donnelly); many people I had a chance to speak with about the changes in Davis Square over the course of this semester, including alums, remarked upon how much the area had been transformed by the Red Line.

The Green Line extension project brings with it many different implications. Fears are abound that rents will raise as the area becomes more gentrified. (Gorewitz). As east Somerville is an area with a large percentage of immigrants and middle to low-income families, there are concerns that these families will not be properly advocated for. If rents are raised, they may be forced to relocate. Questions thus arise of how to protect the needs and interests of those living in Somerville.

## **The History of Nepal**

To understand the backgrounds and motivations for many of the immigrants who have moved to the United States from Nepal, it is first important to understand the history of Nepal.

Nepal is a small country about the size of Illinois (Malik 2008:371) located in South Asia. As of 2006, Nepal had a population of about 27 million (Malik 2008:371). It is a strategic area geographically, with China located to the north and India located to the east, south, and west of Nepal. Access to the sea is found through India, and the two countries have traditionally had open borders (Malik 2008:371). As I found through my interviews and many informal conversations with members of the Nepalese community in Somerville, Nepal and India share many cultural components in common, with Nepalese people even being able to speak Hindi.

Nepal has had a history of poor governance, corruption, and conflicts. However, for the purposes of this particular paper I would like to focus on the one particular recent point in Nepalese history. One of the key events that affected at least one of my interviewees was the Maoist insurgency. “The Maoist insurgency began in 1996 and the settlement process... began after November 2006 with the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement between the government and the Maoist rebels” (Malik 2008:421). Launched by a small extreme communist party, more than 13,000 people were killed, thousands injured and displaced, and millions affected psychologically, economically, and politically (Malik 2008:421). After a second round of talks failed in November 2001, the death toll increased (Malik 2008:421). As can be seen here, the political situation in Nepal was not at its strongest. It was not just the Maoists who were causing problems and instability in Nepal, however. The security forces mobilized against the insurgency have also been accused of human rights violations (Malik 2008:421).

What is significant to note here is that “the Maoists initially attracted popular support by initiating popular activities like punishing moneylenders and local well-off people they labeled as exploiters” (Malik 2008:421). One of the narrators stated in our interview that factories were greatly affected by the Maoists and many had to close down as a result of these actions.

Where did this insurgency start? Traditionally, Nepal has been an unequal society in terms of material well-being, with systematic state neglect of the poor especially in rural areas (Malik 2008:423). “The deregulation of the market since the mid-1980s led to an improvement in some economic indicators such as GDP, growth in output, and exports and international reserve. These were mainly brought about by an expansion of the urban-based modern sector... Large parts of the rural areas stagnated while the urban centers, especially the Kathmandu valley, developed into centers of wealth” (Malik 2008:424). This, combined with a centralization of state power in Kathmandu that was not responsive to those living in the peripheries of Nepal (Malik 2008:427), contributed to the beginning of the Maoist insurgency.

Many of the interviewees for this project came from the Kathmandu area or close to it.

### **South Asian Population in Somerville**

As I had a chance to discover from an informal interview, as early as 2000 there were only 200-300 Nepalese immigrants in the Somerville area. This number has steadily grown since then, though exact numbers are unknown. There are a few reasons why this has happened. The migration from Nepal to the United States may be in part a response to the unstable political situation in Nepal. Shiva Sharma alluded to factories being attacked and having to close his down; this certainly seems to have affected his lifestyle in Nepal in many ways. In addition,

networks are a big draw for many of the Nepalese people who come to Boston. All of my interviewees came to the Boston area because of friends or family who were already located here, and who urged them to relocate. An informal interview with a woman married to a Nepalese immigrant revealed that her husband, upon arriving in the United States for the first time, was easily able to pick up the phone and call five friends. These networks are strong and stable, crossing transnational borders and providing an important social base of support for new immigrants.

The Somerville area has been chosen by immigrants for a variety of other reasons. The cost of living in Somerville is more inexpensive in comparison to Boston proper, but is close enough to allow easy access to a major city. Interestingly, many of the interviewees cited the ease of transportation as one of the primary reasons they chose to settle in or near Somerville, and locate their businesses there. It is not only easy to get to Boston, but many interviewees stated that the large number of bus lines that come by allow them to move around easily. Many of my initial impressions with regards to the building of the Green Line were that Somerville was in need of easy and accessible transportation. However, in the eyes of the residents transportation is already convenient and within reach.

### **Culture, Language, and Workplace Interactions**

As with any tight-knit group, it is clear that the South Asian immigrants attempt to support each other through their hiring practices. In many of the businesses I went to, I saw that many of the workers were of the same nationality. All the workers in the Subway are Nepalese, while the workers in the convenience store section of S&S are all South Asian. Outside of their

own immigrant groups however, there seems to be a strong sense of who is an immigrant and who is not; I never once saw any Caucasians working in these stores and if there was any intermixing of ethnicities, they were all immigrant workers. While one can choose to view immigrant networks according to nationalities, it is important to also note that there is a general solidarity between all kinds of immigrant in general regardless of ethnicity.

From my conversations and interviews in Somerville, it seemed that many South Asians immigrate to the United States and generally first take on blue collar jobs. These include jobs such as waiters or working at convenience stores. I found myself surprised by the fact that educated and experienced men like Shiva Sharma took on these jobs when first arriving to the United States also; perhaps, this is revealing of the difficulties with language barriers and lack of resources and capital available to immigrants to allow them to practice their professions. Because so many South Asians eventually go on to own restaurants and convenience stores, other South Asian immigrants taking on blue collar jobs is perpetuated by this. The hiring practices and ways businesses have evolved create interesting results for the South Asian community here in Somerville.

The use of language was very fascinating. In the workplaces, I was able to overhear the various languages spoken. For example, in Subway I heard Nepalese being spoken. Pradhan told me that Nepalese was spoken when customers weren't around, but English would be spoken when they were. Shiva Sharma, who tends to receive more South Asian customers, would stop and greet them in Hindi or Nepalese. Over the course of my interview with Alex Ahmed, customers of many different nationalities entered and I had the chance to hear him chat in basic Spanish with customers. To me, it is fascinating how these economic spaces are also a place of language exchange, sometimes even languages that are not their first or second.



Communication is indeed an important element of these businesses. In another Korean market in Union Square, Reliable Market, one can see Latino workers mixed with Korean ones. A board can be found in the back of the store full of postings in both English and Korean. At New Market, owned by Shiva Sharma, Nepalese language newspapers are given out. Products on the shelves of many South Asian specialty stores have the names written in both English and Hindi or Nepalese. In another specialty store owned by East Africans, books are sold in Amharic, the language of Ethiopia. Indeed, there is a lot of cross-cultural interaction in the appropriation and use of language.

Language barriers are also an obstacle faced by many immigrants who move to the United States, however. I found that I had difficulties obtaining information in my interview with L.B. Ayer, the manager at India Palace, due to language differences. Besides for affecting these immigrants socially, they are also affected economically when it comes to searching for jobs and getting settled in the community. Not having a proficient grasp on English closes off many job opportunities. In addition, Laxmi Pradhan discussed the difficulty of finding housing or opening bank accounts. With a huge amount of paperwork that is confusing even for the native speaker, negotiating the terms of a lease or opening a bank account may turn into a long, complicated process; Pradhan has been able to help his fellow Nepalese immigrants by assisting them with both.

The presence of religious affiliations could be seen in many of the businesses I visited for both formal and informal interviews. Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim symbols were the primary ones that I spotted. Two of my interviewees, L.B. Ayer and Rongnapa Otero, discussed how they would pray in their workplaces. Ayer discussed how before the opening of the store for the day, he and some of the workers would sometimes pray. Otero pointed out some religious figurines

throughout the store, and what their maintenance required. Other stores, perhaps not as active in their religious practices, still hang up signs of their religious affiliations.

**L.B. Ayer**

L.B. Ayer arrived in the United States in 2003 from Nepal. When he first arrived, he worked as a server in a different restaurant. Then, L.B. began working as a manager at India Palace in 2008. He has many family members and relatives living in the Boston area.

L.B. Ayer and I met at India Palace, where he is the manager, during less busy hours. There was an Indian couple in the restaurant at the time. As I entered, I noted that L.B. was speaking to the Indian couple, and they were discussing their families. Though they had seemingly just met, it seemed already to me that the restaurant is indeed serving as an interesting medium through which social and cultural relations take place. This was later confirmed throughout the interview.

I started out our interview by asking L.B. to discuss his background. The interview itself was somewhat difficult due to language barriers and the fact that L.B. himself is not incredibly verbose. Ayer simply described himself as being from Nepal. He came to the United States in 2003 and began working as a server at a restaurant.

In 2008, L.B. Ayer began working at India Palace as a manager. What was interesting is that L.B. actually received the job through his social network. India Palace is owned by an Indian man, and L.B. has Indian friends who are familiar with the owner. When they heard that a manager position was open, they informed L.B. The owner of the restaurant lives in Kansas City currently, so he only comes to the restaurant every few months. In this way, L.B. essentially runs the restaurant.

A regular day at the restaurant is a busy one for L.B. He states, "I'm the server. I do everything here." The title of manager may not be entirely accurate, as he also sets up the buffet,

brings the food out, socializes with the customers and takes their orders, and essentially acts as a face of the restaurant.

While L.B. meets a lot of Nepalese and Indian people from the restaurant, he told me that the customers are mostly American. Sometimes he meets people at the restaurant who he becomes friends with, while sometimes his other Nepalese friends will come visit.

According to L.B., business has been slow. There was some construction and people stopped coming. Takeout and delivery is far more popular than dining in, as customers have the option to order online and there is free delivery. He is excited about the green line coming to Somerville, as he thinks it will help business and bring people to the area. To him, any new form of transportation in the area is great.

I tried to get L.B. to tell me a little about the Nepalese community and how he met people. L.B. is involved in the Greater Boston Nepalese Community, where he partakes in cultural programs. These programs include Nepalese New Year celebrations, and other events multiple times a year. He told me they celebrate together. L.B. heard about the Greater Boston Nepalese Community from relatives. He mentioned that they used the website. In terms of his social network, L.B. also has many relatives from Nepal who have relocated to the United States.

L.B. discussed Hinduism and Buddhism in the interview also. He prays to gods everyday when he wakes up and practices Buddhism. What was fascinating in the interview was when we finally discussed a little about the cultural sphere in the realm of the restaurant. L.B. told me about how sometimes in the early morning, they would pray in the restaurant for good business and well-being.

**Laxmi Pradhan**

Laxmi Pradhan is originally from Kathmandu in Nepal. As a boy, he attended a Catholic school in Nepal called St. Xavier's. He has a business background, having traveled extensively out of Nepal for his work before moving to the United States in 1999.

Middle aged in either his forties or fifties, Pradhan is married with two sons. The first year he was in the United States, he lived in Michigan. He then moved to Boston in 2000 and has lived in Somerville ever since. Once he arrived, he started with his son several businesses- now, they run a real estate company, a few rental apartments, and run the Subway/Union Mart store in Union Square. They are in the process of opening a new Indian/Nepalese fusion restaurant in Teele Square within the next few months.

Pradhan hopes to return to Nepal in the future. Overall, he is a well respected member of the community who has considerable influence and has seen much of the development of Union Square.

My interview with Laxmi Pradhan was held at the Subway Store/Union Mart located at 71 Union Square on October 31, 2010. Pradhan had to go in to work that day due to a shortage of workers, so we held the interview at one of the tables in the store. The interview itself had to be paused several times for Pradhan could attend to customers, however. Eventually, once things were less busy, the other Nepalese worker left her spot at the Subway station to ring up customers.

The layout of the place consists of a Subway franchise and a convenience store located inside. The Subway area itself holds up to 14 people while the market is a small, modest size- about 20x20 feet. Customers came equally to both parts in the two hours I was there. Around 12

PM, business sped up a bit, but overall the business pace was a fairly slow and relaxed one. About 6 or 7 people came by the convenience store area in the time we conducted our interview while a similar number bought subs from the Subway section of the store.

We began the interview by discussing Laxmi's background. In Nepal he was a trader but didn't attend university. As a trader, Laxmi had the opportunity to travel to other countries and therefore already had a wide exposure to different cultures before moving to the United States. Laxmi's brother-in-law was already in the United States. Because Laxmi had never been there, he decided to come. Partly for the benefit of his children so they could get an education, he made the decision to move. He first moved to Michigan, where his brother-in-law was. Unfortunately, he found that it wasn't up to his expectations and eventually made the move to Boston. He did some odd jobs in both places. Through this, he was able to save and borrow money to start his first business. Now, Laxmi and his immediate family own a few different businesses.

Laxmi Pradhan's first business was in real estate. He worked through other agents, the first one being Gillette Realty. Laxmi got his real estate license and quickly opened his own business, called Everest Realty. The store he is currently working at is owned by his son, but his whole family works at the Union Mart. They take turns in shifts- Laxmi, his wife, and his son all work there to cut back on labor costs. They also have some rental properties, which are owned by Laxmi's wife. It appeared that all members of the family were equally involved in their respective businesses, and each other's.

The location for Union Mart was chosen because the family liked Union Square. The first few years were very difficult for them, as it took a long time to set up the store due to conflicts and many other complicated factors. The Union Mart has been in Union Square for five years

now, with four employees. The employees are all Nepalese and were found through Laxmi's extensive network of Nepalese friends. At the workplace, they all speak Nepali to each other.

There are a few regular customers that come from the local neighborhood. During the time I was there, I saw him chatting with many different customers who he seemed familiar with. There was one man who came in repeatedly to buy scratch-off tickets, who Laxmi knew. In other instances, I saw him greet a customer and ask them about their lives. Despite the fact he did not spend a lot of time articulating the social relations that go on in the store, I was able to see them through my own observations. Laxmi Pradhan may be an immigrant, but he has settled into the Somerville community and etched out a home there.

The convenience store section of the Union Mart was added because the family had a lot of space in the store. When opening the Subway, the city only allowed them to have fourteen seats, which left a lot of open space within the store. Laxmi and his family wanted the opportunity to make some extra income, and adding a convenience store seemed to be the most reasonable adaptation they could make.

Laxmi has interacted with the city many times. He mentioned that organizations such as Somerville Main Street has come to talk to him about changes in Somerville and seemed rather well informed. However, being that discussion of the Green Line being built had gone on for so long, Laxmi seemed to feel it wouldn't really happen. He stated that despite there being meetings held, he simply wanted to concentrate on his work and his business.

Laxmi Pradhan felt that his presence there has worked to improve the community. "Before this house was kind of old and it was an office for homeless people or something, the building was so bad, so we came in, we renovated the whole place, made it look nice. Once we did this, I came to find out the Mexican restaurant nearby, my neighbor, he also improved his

restaurant,” he said, “So now everybody's going for more and more like, appealing... So I think we are doing more than what all of these other organizations are doing. “When he set up the Subway shop, his competitors in the area began to work to clean up their own businesses and the presence of the square improved overall. When the store first opened, the area itself was less busy, but has transformed since then. Through these years, the Union Mart has remained resilient with a steady customer base. “I think people have more choice and I think they like to come to a nice place. Where there are a lot of things,” Laxmi told me.

Laxmi believes that if the Green Line comes, it will become more crowded. He expressed his approval and happiness over the Green Line extension, stating that even if the rents go up, businesses will be much better from the inflow of people and will be able to afford the raise in rents.

Culturally, Laxmi is involved with the Greater Boston Nepalese Committee (GBNC). Representatives called him the night before our interview to ask him for support for Diwali celebrations. “And they want to like, sing song, and like raise some contributions outside the Subway. And they were asking, ‘Can we do that, can you support us?’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, please come. And I will contribute, whatever you need to do, I'm gonna do for you guys,’” Laxmi told me. The celebrations were held outside the store in the open area located within the square. Laxmi also sometimes donates money. He is involved with the Somerville Arts Councils and sometimes provides assistance in organizing arts and cultural programs.

Much of Laxmi's involvement is through the Nepalese people, however. He stated, “A lot of the Nepalese people, they buy houses through me.” Because of Everest Realty, the real estate company Laxmi owns, he works specifically in the niche market of Nepalese immigrants.



Everest Realty does not exclusively work with only Nepalese immigrants; however, this is Laxmi's focus, while his son handles the other clients.

This work with the Nepalese immigrants stemmed from a few things. When Laxmi first moved to Boston, he didn't have anywhere to stay. He eventually moved into a basement but thought a lot about how much things would be improved if there was a better realty company that was geared toward immigrants. With little resources and money, he had trouble with finding housing. He felt that there needed to be more ethnic people involved.

He eventually got his realtors license and started Everest Realty. He has helped a lot of people who want to find homes to buy or sell. In addition, many of the Nepalese immigrants who come to the United States have a lot of communication problems and English. "Ok so when there are like problems in the city, they're fixing up their houses they contact me, or with the bank," Laxmi said. Laxmi is able to help them with these issues so they can better understand how to fill out forms, work with banks, and much more. When I asked how people knew to get in touch with him Laxmi said, "It's like, you know me. You tell somebody, that's how everybody knows me." Indeed, the community seems even stronger because he is so deeply connected with the Nepalese community. In this way, there is a lot of trust in conducting business.

His parents and family all have business backgrounds in Nepal. I was unable to really get a good idea of why he decided to leave to begin with, given how profitable it was. While I have heard the reason for lack of jobs and opportunities from others, this doesn't seem to be the reason Laxmi left. However, Laxmi has been able to find success in the United States. He and his family have been quite successful business wise, with a strong team to run the businesses. Laxmi comes up with the ideas while his son is the one who executes the ideas.

According to Prabhan, Somerville is a good place for Nepalese people to live because it's convenient and because there are a lot of family and friends here. He came to Boston because he had some friends here already. Laxmi does go to social events to meet people. He knows a lot of people. I even mentioned L.B. Ayer in this interview and he mentioned how he had sold L.B. a house.

Currently, Laxmi believes it is still important to remain involved with his business. He believes a high level of involvement is still necessary to retain the level of service that they are able to provide. Even within his shop, he hires Nepalese people. Part of this is because of the community, and because Laxmi feels more confident that they are able to understand the situation of his business and community.

Ultimately, Laxmi hopes to move back to Nepal. All of his brothers, sisters, and parents are still in Nepal. He remains closely tied to his original home.

**Shiva Sharma**

Shiva Raj Sharma is an immigrant from Nepal. He is 41 years old and is married. He has two children, boys, ages 10 and 14, who are still in Nepal but will be arriving in the United States in a few months.

Shiva has a business background, having run a factory in Nepal for almost ten years. He is originally from the Chitwan District, about 100 miles from Kathmandu. Shiva has a master's degree in commerce.

Sharma moved to the United States in 2003, established a company in New York, but then closed it in 2004. He moved to Boston in 2005 at the urging of his sister and has lived here ever since. Having worked in a grocery store, Subway, and a CVS in Cambridge, he started New Market in January 2010, where he is currently working.

My interview with Shiva Sharma was held at around 6:00 PM while he was the only one working. The interview itself had to be paused several times for Sharma to attend to customers and answer the phone. We sat behind the register and chatted, pausing every now and then for Shiva to speak with regulars and people coming in to buy things. In the hour or so I was there, between 10-15 people showed up. The environment itself was very informal and relaxed.

The layout of the store is that of a typical convenient store. However, it is split between products specifically for an American audience and products for Shiva's Nepalese and Indian customers. The distinction is about fifty-fifty; there are equal numbers of American and South Asian products. In addition, it is somewhat different from what one might expect to see in a convenience store such as CVS; fresh produce, though small in number, is also sold. Free Nepalese newspapers, which are published in New York City, are sent to Shiva and he gives

them out in his store. In addition, a calendar from the Greater Boston Nepali Church hangs by the register.

We began the interview by discussing Shiva's background. He is originally from the Chitwan district, 100 miles away from Kathmandu. Shiva's father was a teacher and his uncle was a social worker. His father opened many schools and colleges. His uncle was a minister in the government, working for the department of Land and Resources. Both seemed to have an activist record, working hard to support their communities.

I was surprised to discover that Shiva opened his first business from a very young age. "When I was young, like 23 24 when I established my own company over there. I had around, like, 150 people working in my factory at that time." Shiva ran a factory for almost ten years, producing cotton towels. In 1994, Shiva got his master's degree in commerce. He has a strong background in business and has traveled widely throughout South Asia, Europe, and even the Americas.

Shiva is one of the business owners affected by the Maoist insurgency I wrote about earlier. He stated, "The Maoist, they started the one party... 1996. They started to fight against the government. They just do attack the people and the factory owner, like lots of those things and death. That way, around like. From 2000-2003 almost like 90 percent factories has closed." Because of the political problems faced from the Maoist insurgency that began in 1996, Shiva chose to leave Nepal and move to the United States in 2003. It was especially dangerous at the time for factory owners, who Shiva stated were targeted by the Maoist rebels. He did not close down his factory right away, however; it remained open for one more year before Shiva closed it.

Shiva moved first to New York City. While there, he opened his own business importing cotton towels from his factory in Nepal. This only lasted a year until 2004, when he decided to

close both the factory and the business. Importing was too much of a problem, so the business no longer seemed viable.

In 2005, Shiva moved to Boston. He was drawn here partly because he had a sister who suggested he moved here. As of now, the only family Shiva has in the United States is his sister, brother-in-law, and nephew. Shiva moved to Somerville, where he lives a seven to ten minute walk from Union Square. I asked him why he chose to move to Somerville, and he responded by saying, "I think the, first thing is transportation is very easy, convenient. You know, you get the bus, train, and when they want to go it's very easy, you know? Convenience? And secondly, you know, the environment is very good. You know, Boston is very old city, very famous."

According to Shiva the Boston area is a desirable place to live, especially Somerville, because of the easy transportation between places with the help of buses. He mentioned Malden, which he feels is simply too far away to move around easily. "Somerville is just very, it's very easy for the convenience, for the bus, train," he said. "If people who live in the Malden, they have to walk like maybe ten minutes for needing the bus. For Somerville, in two, three minutes walking, you can catch any bus." To Shiva, convenience is key.

Shiva's first job in Boston was at a grocery store in Cambridge. In 2006 he became the unofficial owner of a Subway in Central Square, essentially leasing it from an Indian man who was the official owner. He ran the Subway for almost four years, working as a manager and left in August or September 2009. During this time, Shiva also worked at a CVS where he was the shift supervisor. He left the job right before he opened the New Market in January 2010. This was a very stressful and busy time for him. As Shiva said, "Yeah, we came from... poor country. So we had to work too much, too many hours." As an entrepreneur and an immigrant, Shiva had to work very hard.

Shiva was attracted to this particular location because he felt that the location was in a good area, busy enough to attract some customers. In addition, Shiva stated, “Because in Somerville the most population are from Nepali people... That's why I decide to open ...the Nepali grocery and the convenience store.” He was drawn to the large population of Nepali people in Somerville and felt that he would have a business niche. Though there are American products, the store itself advertises as a Nepali and Indian grocery store. Many of the people who came through the store during the course of my interview with him were indeed Nepalese.

Currently, the business has three employees. “Me, my wife, and another,” Shiva stated when asked who worked at the store, “Well, he's my friend. He just helping me yeah, a couple of hours.” Shiva’s story is a good example of how networks are crucial to success for immigrants in the United States.

Regular customers to the convenience store include people who work in the area and many Nepalese and Indian people. Shiva generally works between the hours of 8 AM to 6 PM, Monday through Friday. On this particular day, he was working until closing at 10 PM because the person who usually worked that shift was unable to come.

Since opening the business, Shiva has successfully managed to advertise and market himself. He takes out ads in the Nepali community paper, which is published in New York City. The newspapers are mailed to Shiva, which he shares with the Nepalese community through his store. He was actually approached by the paper to advertise. Though the newspaper is published in New York, it is very common in Boston also.

When Shiva first came to Boston, he encountered Union Square. According to him, Union Square was far more congested, with very narrow roads. “I came to Boston first time like 2003, when I was in New York. And at that time it was very congested place, you know. The

road was very narrow... when I came next time like 2005 here. And at that time, I think they were doing the construction?” Construction finished on the roads around 2006, and the process was a problem for many of the businesses in this area. This is a sentiment that I heard a few times from previous interviews with Rongnapa Ontero and L.B. Ayer. However, Shiva now says, “But now it looks way better, very good.” He feels that the Union Square area has improved and is busier now.

Shiva is unsure about the Green Line expansion. “I think the business will be better,” he stated. He has hopes that business will improve once the green line comes in. His store space is rented, not owned. In addition, he has an eight year contract for the business. This means the rent will change every two years and increase slightly, but he knows what he will be paying for the foreseeable future. As to what will happen after eight years, Shiva is really not sure.

As for the future of his business, Shiva hopes to continue expanding the store. He is happy with the way it is right now, and hopes it will continue to become more and more successful.

On the cultural side, Shiva is not as involved with the Greater Boston Nepali Community (GBNC), though he knows about it. He participates in cultural programs a few times a year. There is the Laxmi *mandir* in Framingham, a Buddhist temple where he goes to pray about two times a year. However, Shiva still prays everyday on his own.

Shiva’s social network has developed mainly through connections and introductions between friends. Despite the fact that he came to Boston not knowing many people and having few relatives, through his store and mutual friends he has made the acquaintances of many Nepalese people in the Somerville community. During the course of our interview when

customers came in, Shiva often stopped to speak with many of them in Nepali and they were clearly familiar with each other.

In the future, Shiva hopes to work fewer hours. While he worked at CVS and Subway, Shiva was working 80 hour weeks in order to save up money to open his own store. “You know this time, I’ve been here in America like five years, so I’m thinking I’m almost 40 plus, so after ten years, after fifteen, I don’t want to work, like, this kind of business, and I have too much work,” he told me. “Just part time, you know. Twenty, thirty hours. Just run the business. If doing good business, it’s ok. You know, just run the business. But, I don’t want to work like, full-time, after fifty.” While he hopes to stay in the United States and has no intention of returning to Nepal, Shiva wants to remain connected to his home country by doing social work and working on projects to lessen the burdens of poverty that are there currently.



**Alex Ahmed**

My interview with Alex Ahmed was held at around 6:40 PM while he was the only one working at S&S. S&S stands for Summer & School, the street intersections the store rests upon. The interview itself had to be paused several times for Ahmed to attend to customers and answer the phone. We sat behind the register and chatted, pausing every now and then for Ahmed to speak with people coming in to buy things and answer the phone. The environment itself was very informal and relaxed.

The store has a somewhat unusual layout. There is a section for the typical generic convenience store. However, to the right there is a kitchen with four men working and cooking pizza, subs, and, in a somewhat cultural stroke, halal shawarma. Halal food is food that is designated edible according to Islam. Shawarma is a sandwich-like wrap of shaved meat generally made with pita bread, tomato, cucumber, and toppings like hummus. Two or three tables with benches are located to one side of the store, in front of an open kitchen where customers can see the cooks preparing food. This keeps the store from having one certain environment, as it carries both the calm atmosphere of a convenience store and the active environment of a bustling small restaurant.

We began the interview by discussing Alex's background. Alex is originally from Karachi, Pakistan. He received an Masters in Public Administration from there. In 2001, Alex moved to New York City to study for an Masters in Business Administration from New York Institute of Technology. "I actually, I graduated from my country, Pakistan. I did MPA, Public Administration, so I wanted to go for higher studies. So I heard USA has the best studies, you

know, the schools and colleges, best in the world,” he told me. During this, he spent some time living in Queens, and was married.

Alex got divorced and moved to Boston in 2005. He first lived in Brighton, largely because he had friends already there. Working with a business partner, Alex opened two cell phone stores. “I graduated,” he said, “I know sometimes it's hard to get your first job. So I was applying for job also. And um, I got this opportunity with one of my friends he was opening up a cell phone store and he just talked and said, ‘I want to open up this if you want to be a partner of it,’ so I become his partner.” These stores remained open for about four years, until they both ran into business troubles. In 2008, he opened S&S, taking it over somewhat abandoned from a previous owner. In the hopes of bringing in some extra income, he maintained all three businesses until 2009. He sold S&S to a friend of his in August 2009, and the two cell phone stores also closed down.

Shortly after, Alex began to work with Sprint on B2B, or business to business, sales. However, he was laid off in January 2010. As a result, he decided to return to S&S and work with his friend as a manager, handling finances and other responsibilities and working a few days a week. As of two weeks ago, however, Alex had just received a job with New West Marketing as a market manager.

Alex had decided to take over S&S, a store that has been open and passed from owner to owner for over fifty years now, when he heard that it was for sale through some friends. The previous owner of the store had only kept the store open between two to three hours a day, and there was very little inventory. “My other business at that time was going ok, but not doing well. It was doing ok. So I thought uh, maybe opening up this business will give me another opportunity to earn money, you know?” In his mind, there was a good opportunity here.

However, the experience itself was very stressful. “So basically at that time, my job was basically working for the cell phone store that I had, so that was the main thing,” he explained. “This one was like, when it turned into a partnership, I told him, ‘I cannot be here more than twenty hours... I can push it to that.’ I ended up being here for like 35 hours... You know, I used to leave home 7, 8 in the morning for the other store and then close this at 11. Cause I’d be at work over there til 8 and then come over here and close at 11 and then go home. So that was very stressful and then we had some defenses, the other guy was like we’re not making any money. We’re running at a loss of property. To run it properly, we need to fill this up first. And then wait for one year at least to build up your rapport, your good will, and then people start coming, you know. They know that the store won’t close and will have stuff, and they’ll come.” At this point, Alex was working many hours despite other commitments, and it was a very stressful time.

Originally part-time and focused on the cell phone store, Alex has still managed to expand the store and its inventory ten times. The kitchen space, which was unused by the previous store owner, is now subleased to some Moroccan men, who sell pizza, subs, salads, and shawarma. About five people work in the kitchen.

Three people work in the actual convenience store, not including Alex. One is the owner, one is a fellow Pakistani friend, and another one is a Nepalese man who simply walked in looking for a job. I noticed that Alex neglected to mention Abid, who is the father of the owner, Asif. My first time visiting S&S, Abid was working.

Echoing sentiments heard from previous interviews, Alex described Union Square as very congested when he first opened the store. This was due to the construction that was taking place, creating a lot of traffic. Overall, Alex feels that so many people have settled here because of how accessible it is to Boston and thinks that it is a good location. He currently lives in

Quincy, and has never lived in Somerville before. I asked Alex why he thinks so many South Asians move to Somerville. “I believe it's because some of them are blue collar workers. Some of them are white collar workers. It is close. That's why things are accessible,” he said. “T, buses, accessible. So that's why they live here. They can find odd jobs in the blue collar worker profession. They can find jobs at convenience store, gas stations. They don't have cars and they don't need to take long routes on the T, red line, and all these things.” This is in line with how others view Somerville in terms of accessibility.

In Alex's opinion, the Green Line expansion is a very good thing. It will bring more business to the area and allow for greater success. “This is exciting, you know, because we are in this and I believe that our business is going to be affected in a positive way as long as it's completed because lots of students and other people will move, you know,” he told me. In addition, he is not very concerned about the rent costs because the business currently has a fifteen year lease. He also stated that the owner of the building is an Indian man, as if them both being of South Asian descent meant that they would treat each other fairly.

Culturally speaking, Alex is not especially involved in any Pakistani activities. However, he prays every Friday at a mosque in Quincy. He hopes to get involved in the community more, and is especially interested in the work of Somerville Community Corporation, as he has interacted with Lisa Gimbel.

For the future, Alex hopes that the business will continue expanding. He would like to bring in Pakistani and Indian products to sell in the convenience store, as he feels the niche markets are very strong. In addition, he would like to use the kitchen space to also sell Pakistani food and become more demographic specific. Currently, because his store is rather generic, most of the customers are simply people who live in the immediate area. They are white, Latino, and

black. A natural entrepreneur, Alex told me of his plans. “What we are doing right now is, like, this kitchen, we are not running by self. We sublease it. So right now it's subleased to these guys, are Moroccan, but they are leaving because they have other business. So that other business is getting busy,” he told me. “So there's another guy who is, who is subleasing it from us and he's from Pakistan. And he wants to cook Pakistani food. And I know that going to drive a lot of Pakistani and Indian people. And once they come in, we give them other things, you know. Like groceries from Pakistan and India, they build some of this. See, I'm very good with this business. So that's why I'm here, planning.” Alex has picked up on the potential of these niche markets and hopes to be able to appeal to the steadily growing population of South Asians in the Somerville area.

With his new job, Alex is likely to drop his involvement down to working just one or two days a week at the store. His future goal is ultimately to again open his own cell phone store. He told me he believed that it would be better than his previous business- “Because that's experience of failure, you know? So, but not everyone has those things. So I know what we lacked last time.” This will be refined compared to his previous businesses, as he will make it a one-stop cell phone store that will also have a repair center. In addition, he feels confident that he has picked his new partner far more carefully. He explained to me that Sprint does not allow a repair center unless the owner has a franchise of seven or more stores; however, his business partner has seventeen stores and is interested in letting Alex run several of them.

As for his future, Alex simply smiled and stated that he wanted to “be a nice person”. “As far as money's concerned, I believe that's in your fate, it's in your luck. You're gonna get it, you know,” he told me. “No matter. I mean, you have to just work you know. If you just sit home,

you're not gonna get it. But if you just work, you're gonna get it. Just be a nice person, that's it.”

Alex remains hopeful for the future and is ever persistent in his enterprises.

## **Education**

From both the formal and informal interviews I conducted, I found certain patterns in education levels of many of the interviewees. Most are educated or have a lot of experience as entrepreneurs. Shiva Sharma has a master's degree in commerce, while Alex Ahmed has both a Masters in Public Administration and a Masters in Business Administration. Rongnapa Otero, the owner of Sweet Ginger Thai, has a degree in hospitality studies. Sharma, Ahmed, and Pradhan all had years of experience in business. For example, in Nepal Sharma had run a factory for ten years while Pradhan had worked as a trader.

## **Transformation of Space**

In the same note of innovation, two of these entrepreneurs transformed their spaces to serve a dual purpose. The S&S convenience store was the second store I encountered that both served food and also was a convenience store, the other one being Union Market in Union Square. This seems largely to be a response to wanting more financial security in the business. The two stores I encountered this in evolved differently. S&S started as a convenience store and grew to include the selling of food. The Subway started out as a food store, and grew to accommodate the convenience store section. Both were done for economic reasons, to save money or try to earn more.

Space was also appropriated in these stores for cultural reasons. The selling of ethnic goods would appeal to the immigrant community. Entrepreneurs like Sharma and Ahmed intend to tap into "a...niche in the general market arises where the demand for exotic goods among the native population allows immigrants to convert both the contents and symbols of ethnicity into profit-making commodities" (Storey 934).

### **Opinions of the Green Line**

All of my formal interviewees are delighted about the expansion of the Green Line into Somerville. They are hopeful that the Green Line will bring more business and more traffic. As Laxmi Pradhan stated, “In the future, when the Green Line comes, it gets more crowded, that's one possibility.” L.B. Ayer laughed as he said, “Yeah, we have good feel when it comes to Green Line here. We really need it here in Somerville... It comes here, everybody happy.” Shiva Sharma believes that business would improve, stating, “If Green Line go through the Union Square, actually I think the business will be better.” In addition, Alex Ahmed believes that more people will also settle in east Somerville, including students, as this opens up even more business opportunities for them. As he stated, “A lot of students probably will move nearby, you know... prices of the rent will go high. Prices for this building, for the property is gonna go high... and the business is gonna make more money because there's gonna be more business.” There is an awareness that Somerville will grow and become more crowded, and also the awareness that rents may rise. Though in my initial conversations my interviewees were not aware as to the exact details of the Green Line, many not even knowing that it would be in the Union Square area, they all have opinions as to what the foreseeable effects of the Green Line will be and are still realistically aware of the fact that rents rising is a real possibility.

It is important to note, however, that my interviewees were all working with businesses with long term leases. For the next foreseeable ten years, they know exactly what the rent they are paying will be. Many are relatively unconcerned with what will happen beyond ten years, feeling that things will work out. In the immediate future at least, the fear of rents rising is not an issue. I heard a different voice in one of my informal interviews in Union Square, however. An owner of a restaurant had very strong negative opinions about the Green Line, stating that his



rent would be raised and he couldn't afford to keep paying it if that happened. It seems that if rents are raised dramatically, he will no longer be able to support his business and keep it going. Laxmi Pradhan offered an alternative and more moderate viewpoint, stating that while rents may be raised, more customers will come in to provide economic support to these businesses. As a result, the businesses should make enough money to adapt to the raised rents and still pay them without incurring a huge financial burden. Nevertheless, for businesses that have long term leases and stable rent, the future seems bright. This is not the case for all businesses, however. It is a message we must remember so that we may better protect the needs and interests of all immigrant owned businesses in Union Square.

## Conclusions

From this, it can be seen that the community will inevitably be affected by the Green Line expansion project. Opinions vary as to what will happen; the interviewees all seemed rather optimistic, but other members in the community are more apprehensive about the effects of the Green Line. With it comes a possibility of gentrification and a raised cost of living, which is sure to affect the immigrant population in Somerville. However, with the expansion of the Green Line also comes an expansion of business opportunities and customer base. Though there are many buses that run through Somerville and the Union Square area, the Green Line will provide another form of transportation that connects previously unconnected parts of Boston. The allure to this is undeniable, and it is inevitable that many students and young professionals may be drawn to the area as a result.

It is important to support the businesses in Somerville by raising awareness of the details of the Green Line. Many business owners are hopeful but know little of the details of the actual project; the idea of rents rising has not crossed their minds. As busy business owners, having the time to get involved in community meetings is more of a privilege and a luxury than a real possibility. This information should be brought to them to keep them informed about the process and so that they can better advocate for themselves.

In addition, language barriers are a significant problem for the immigrant community in general. Entrepreneurs like Laxmi Pradhan have taken the lead in helping their community to access resources, but language issues is still a significant problem. Before starting this project, I feel that I never fully comprehended the importance of Basic English language skills. Now, however, I better understand the value of English as a Second Language classes. If we hope to

empower the immigrant community to advocate for themselves and remain informed, gaining the proper English skills may be the first step.

It is also important to support the immigrant leaders that are already there. They are the most important avenue into the heart of the community, and to gain support of these leaders is to have a voice to speak out for the many who are not able to or simply don't have the time and privilege to do so. A collaborative process must be undertaken for there to be effective advocating.

Somerville is a community of rich diversity and a small bustling economic center in its own right. This has been made possible largely to the support of the often unseen immigrants that are the foundation of these businesses- whether as manual workers or business owners, these immigrants have contributed to the success and growth of Somerville. As can be seen from the papers of my fellow classmates, Somerville is an important resource for cultural diversity. A potential consequence of not protecting the interests of these immigrants is that this cultural richness of Somerville may be lost once the Green Line is built.

Early on in this paper, I referred to my own motivations for conducting this research; having been raised in a tight knit immigrant community, I wanted to better understand how they formed and evolved in Somerville. I cited this early in the beginning of my paper and I do it again because I believe these sentences sum up the experience for me as an ethnographer.

“Clearly, any ethnographic representation... inevitably includes a self-representation. Even more subtly, the act of representing ‘almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation,’ using as it must some degree of reduction, decontextualization, and miniaturization” (Behar 1993:271). Throughout my research, I found myself drawn to the sense

of community that was found, and amazed by the way immigrants manage to put down roots in new lands.

In my research, I hoped to be able to truly get to the heart of what makes Somerville so unique- the immigrant community. In a world that is increasingly connected through globalization and technological advancements, the idea of borders is more fluid and permeable than ever. In writing ethnographies, one must take into account the idea of borderlands. As Ruth Behar states, “it now seems impossible to imagine doing any kind of ethnography without a concept of the borderlands or of border crossings. The concept of the borderlands... is rooted in the slippery social landscape created by transnational capitalism and migration” (1993:15). I discovered this through my interviews with L.B. Ayer, Laxmi Pradhan, Shiva Sharma, Alex Ahmed, and many informal conversations within the Somerville community. The borderlands were ever present in my research and in the lives of these immigrants even before they came to the United States, as could be seen through the complex networks of friends and family that were cultivated.

I also came to discover the strength of immigrant networks in foreign places. I have been amazed by the innovation and ideas behind what immigrants have done to solidify and create their communities. The entrepreneurial spirit of Laxmi Pradhan’s company, Everest Realty, has helped many Nepalese immigrants find homes, making a complicated process easier. Specialty convenience stores like New Market, owned by Shiva Sharma, allow immigrants to access products that are difficult to find. Organizations like the Greater Boston Nepali Community bring together Nepalese people for cultural celebrations, and already existing social networks provide new immigrants with strong support when they arrive. There is indeed a cultural richness to be found on every level, whether economically or socially.

I began my research with the idea that these immigrant-owned businesses would become a gathering place, a cultural and social site for immigrants; this was based off of my own experiences of immigrant communities built around whole neighborhoods that had Chinese supermarkets, weekend schools, and more. The South Asian immigrant communities are still growing, but are beginning to show glimmers of this. The businesses did indeed have an abundance of social and cultural interactions, but just as often as not, these interactions were with others outside of their ethnic and national groups. While the workers at Union Mart speak in Nepali with each other and share a common culture, Alex Ahmed exchanges words of Spanish with regular customers he is familiar with. Shiva Sharma's convenience store sells specialty products for those who are homesick, while also disseminating Nepali newspapers. Other stores in Union Square have boards for announcements in multiple languages and sell books or cloths from other countries. It is a beautiful array of cross-cultural collisions that show how immigrant communities integrate into their new communities while also reaching out to create their own ethnic networks.

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*Pictured: India Palace, where L.B. Ayer is manager.*



*Pictured: Laxmi Pradhan inside Subway, his business.*



The convenience store section of the Subway.

**खसीको कबाफ**

बेसार - अगा चिया चम्पा  
 चुक्र - अगा चिया चम्पा

**बलाउने तरिका**

कबाफ बनाउने सामग्री तयार भएपछि एउटा घुलो नौकोमा मासुपनित्र भातिका सरे सामग्रीलाई राखेर पकाउनु भोला । भोलाको मासुलाई कटाईमा राखेर पकाउने । पकाउदा सरे चला आगो लगाउने । मन्द-मन्द आगो लगाएर बेला-बेलामा चलाउँदै सरे बेर लगाएर पकाउने । बोसो र तेल भएपछि मसला बढ्ने सम्भावना रहँदैन । लामो समय लगाएर पकाएपछि कबाफ तयार भयो कि भएन भनी चाख्ने । स्वादअनुसार नुन-पीरो भएमा खसीको मासुको कबाफ पनि खानका लागि तयार हुन्छ । यसरी पकाएको कबाफलाई तीन/चार दिनसम्म फ्रिजमा नराखीकन पनि खान सकिन्छ तर मासुमा बोसो र तेल चाहिँ हुनुपर्छ ।

१ कोजी मासुको कबाफ बनाउन चाहिँने सामग्री  
 कोसीको काटेको खसीको मासु - १ कोजी  
 तेल - १०० मिली  
 चिउ - २५ ग्राम  
 काको घुलो - ३ चिया चम्पा  
 को घुलो - २ चिया चम्पा  
 मसलाको घुलो - १ चिया चम्पा  
 को खुर्सानीको घुलो - १ चिया चम्पा

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Photos of a Nepali language newspaper that Shiva Sharma gives out in his store.

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Above: Shiva Sharma, owner of New Market  
Below: Indian and Nepalese products sold at New Market





*Above:* Alex Ahmed, manager and former owner of S&S  
*Below:* A look at both the convenience store and food section of the store.

