Chapter 6

The Indians in Chicago: Living America and Celebrating India

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to examining the social fields and contexts of Indian immigrants living in Chicago and its suburbs. We continue our discussion from chapter four and five by reintroducing and expanding on the contexts and everyday social fields that make up the Indian community. We will place our fieldwork data and analysis in the same thematic fashion – in terms of family, the market and the media – that we followed in chapter four, when discussing the Indian families who live in Delhi.

The middle class Indian immigrants that I interacted with in Chicago and the neighbourhoods are definitely well-off. Their annual income is more than 25 percent higher than the national average; the Indians are clearly among the professional-managerial middle class. This class typically consists of white collar professionals, many with graduate degrees, with educational attainment serving as the main distinguishing feature of this class. While the successful Indian immigrants enjoyed their American Dream of lavish lifestyle, they were insulated in many ways from their host country and also from home. The pre-silicon immigrant had fewer contacts with home – not as many phone calls, and there were not as frequent trips to India. However, globalising flows have changed that now; there are frequent interactions with family members back home. Also India is closer. Indian things – food, clothes, movies, newspapers etc, are much more easily available. These flows have certainly
impacted the way people consume and in turn articulate their identity. This chapter is devoted to exploring the social fields of Indians in Chicago and its suburbs.

6.2 Indian Migrants and Their Spaces of Interaction

I happened to be invited to a pongalsankrantri (festivities revolving around the harvesting of winter crop, an important festival for Tamilians) celebration organised by a Tamil association based in Chicago, in 2003. I spent the entire day at the event, where nearly everyone spoke in Tamil. Almost all the women wore sarees, the young girls were seen in salwar kameez (a traditional attire in North India) or ghagra cholis (a skirt and a blouse in a more contemporary Hindi movie style). Quite a few men wore vaishti (a traditional attire of a loose shift of off-white cloth worn by men). The food served was the traditional fare that is cooked for pongal and sankrantri. The organisers had put up a variety show which of course also revolved around Tamil culture but was largely film based. On the way back home, from the event, a member of the Tamil family with whom I happen to go to the event said “I almost forget, at times like this, that we are not in India, it feels so much like I am home”. There are many such families, especially the ones who moved to America in the sixties whose closest friends invariably were Indians. Aditi Banerjee says this about her parents “My parents came to Chicago from Calcutta in the 1960s. They associated with Bengalis and their closest friends have remained Bengali, it is with the Bengalis of Chicago that we have celebrated and to this day celebrate Thanksgiving, New Year’s, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, and Saraswati Puja. What binds them together is not just the language but also the shared memories of the home they left behind”. 

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For many families and young professionals who set out to America in the 1960s interacting and forming groups with fellow Indians, who missed the sounds, smells and all that is home, was a way of surviving in an alien land. Indians everywhere, including in America were notoriously insular in many ways, trying to cling on to their ways and traditions and having a minimal social interaction with their host country. As has been observed by many scholars on diaspora, diasporic communities indeed were/are exemplified by a tenuous connection with the homeland, tinged often with nostalgia and sometimes imagined perceptions and links with motherland, in a general sense of dislocation and isolation. As Tololyan points out the term once implied… “meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness” (Tololyan, 1991:4-5).

The nostalgia and longing for home has expressed itself in a constant creation of bringing home abroad and creating an India abroad (see Shukla, 2003). With the increasing number of immigrants in to Chicago, organisation formed by Indians have grown considerably. “The Indian population has grown steadily….Chicago has the third largest concentration of Indians in the U.S. The 1980 census recorded 33,541 Indians in the Chicago metropolitan region; in 1995, according to informal estimates, their number had grown to 80,000, scattered throughout the suburbs with concentrations in the western and northern suburbs”(www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Diaspora/diaspora). With growing number of Indians from different regions and ethnicities of India, the organisations formed by them also reflect the variations in their origin and the contexts they come from. Vinay Lal on his Indian diaspora website writes:

The ethnic, linguistic, and cultural divisions that prevail in India have been carried over with organisations such as the Bengali Association, the Bihar Cultural Association, the Tamil Nadu Foundation, the Telugu Association, the Punjabi Cultural Society, the Maharashtra Mandal, and at least three Gujarati associations.
Other organisations strive to evoke a more comprehensive notion of 'Indianness': prominent among these are the Indian Classical Music Circle, which sponsors recitals by major Indian musicians, and the Chicago chapters of various professional organisations of Americans of Indian origin. Until the 1980s, no organisation addressed adequately the problems encountered by Indian women, many of them unacquainted with social and legal services. Apna Ghar was set up in 1989-90 to meet this need as a shelter for battered Indian women and counseling service (ibid).

As Vinay Lal writes many organisations indeed do revolve around the notion of 'Indianness' and various cultural traditions within. However, the more recent organisation, mainly started by the newer generation of immigrants and second generation Indian-Americans are organisation which concern professional interests such as the Network of Indian American Professionals and organizations bases on the issues of gender and sexuality such as the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Organisation aka Khuli Zaban, which do not necessarily relate to India, but affirm their Indian identity in the context of larger America and these organisation also reflect emerging issues and concerns that occupy the newer generations.

With growing number of Indians, the spaces where they could congregate and interact have also grown. Two of these spaces that are discussed are the little India of Chicago the Devon Avenue and the several temples that dot the greater Chicago region. Both these spaces are emblematic of the presence of Indian diaspora and the social fields that are part of the everyday life. These spaces figured as one more subfields in our field investigation. I will briefly discuss these two social fields of the Indian diaspora in Chicago land before the main themes under which the ethnographic findings are laid out.
6.2.1 Devon Avenue: The Little India

Most immigrant populations and minorities are known to invest a space they occupy in their host country with all things ‘home’ by creating enclaves that represent the community. The minority or ethnic enclaves have existed as long as there has been movement of people and trade. Jewish ghettos and China town have existed for a long time in modern cities, and they are the spaces that enclose the minority or immigrant community, both physically and metaphorically, and also spaces for tourist consumption as the ‘Other’. In Chicago too there is the Indian enclave like elsewhere, where there is a concentration of Indian populations like Jackson Heights in New York or Southall in London.

The Indian enclave in Chicago is often referred to as the ‘Little India’ of Chicago is spread along the length of Devon Avenue on the northern fringe of the city. It is, barring perhaps Jackson Heights, the busiest Indian "neighbourhood" in the United States. Indian restaurants proliferate, as do Indian grocery stores, boutiques, electronic stores, video and entertainment shops, and jewelry shops. “Here, as elsewhere in the Indian diaspora, commercial Hindi films are extremely popular, and may well be the element that cements Chicago's diverse Indian population into a more cohesive identity” (ibid). The Devon avenue neighbourhood is a conflation and dispersion of the various differences within India. For instance, the Patel Brothers, a grocery store that caters to the Indian population in general, also features specialty items that cater to specific ethnicities and regions. The Patel Brothers sell, for instance gongura and dosakai (vegetables that are a favourites among the Telugu population), Sona Masoori rice, papad made in rural Gujarat and many such items that cater to the regional palates of India.
The Patel Brothers or for that matter the Devon avenue's Little India is at once indicative of the Indianess as well as the regional differences within India and in South Asia, capturing the dynamic sets of relationship within a particular community, between communities and regions and nations and of course the larger world. The entire stretch of Devon Avenue houses establishments that represent the south Asian regions, religions, ethnicities and communities.

Devon Avenue, with its honorary name of “Gandhi Marg”

The contestations and identity politics are also reflected in the way the ‘place’ of Devon avenue is organised, lived and owned by the communities: For instance, the growing strength of Indians is indicated by the fact that in 1991, the 'Little India' stretch of Devon was also designated Gandhi Marg (Way), which in turn prompted Pakistanis to press for the re-designation of an adjoining stretch to Muhammad Ali Jinnah Way, in memory of the founder of Pakistan. For a passer in this neighbourhood, the distinctions within the South Asian regions and the politics of contestation -- of state, nation and
community are not immediately visible. But for this superimposed markers of division such as partitioning off the streets in three sates – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; represented by their nation’s iconic figures of Gandhi and Jinnah and Mujibur.

Currently, only a small percentage of Indian immigrants in the Chicago metropolitan area live in the areas adjacent to Devon, only 4.3% according to the 2000 Census. Meanwhile, 21.4% of all Pakistani immigrants and 20.3% of Bangladeshi immigrants in the Chicago area live near Devon. Devon's weekend population, however, is considerably more diverse, as first and second generation immigrants from all over the subcontinent come to Devon from suburbs as far away as Schaumburg, and Aurora to shop in the area’s stores, eat in restaurants, and participate in festivals. The diversity of regions, languages, cultures, and religions along Devon enables the construction of a pan-Indian identity based on particular forms of consumption. Meanwhile, the particular consumption opportunities draws non-South Asians to Devon, both from the adjacent neighborhood, from all over the Chicago metropolitan area, as well as from other parts of the U.S.
Devon Avenue is, for all purposes, the place where India is to be found in greater Chicago region. It is the Devon Avenue neighbourhood, where the little India lives in all it essentialist elements, it is a place “where you don’t feel out of place wearing a saree” as one of my interviewee told me. She added ;“Everything about Devon Avenue is like home, the sights, sounds and smells...including the general chaos and occasional garbage heaps”
Patricia Govas at the Chamber of Commerce described Devon as the public face of Chicago’s South Asian population, explaining that a business on Devon establishes legitimacy for South Asian-owned businesses. “When you see their commercials on the Indian cable station, they advertise their Devon store first, even if they have stores in the suburbs.” While many advertise their Devon avenue shops first, it is not always that the suburban population travels to these places first. Many of the suburbs, with high concentration of Indian populations have started establishing businesses and restaurants that cater to the needs of the suburbanites. A large number of Indians who were forced to make the trips to Devon now avoid the trips. The avoidance is in part an attempt to differentiate themselves from the new immigrants that seem to be drawn to Devon Avenue for the comfort level it offers. As I explained earlier many of the new immigrants who are from the working class find it easier to start out from the ethnic enclaves like Devon Avenue. The Little India enclave provides them initial succor, comfort and necessary networks, before they can move out to suburbs, which is a sure sign of their upward mobility.

While established immigrants from all groups generally seek to differentiate themselves from their more recent counterparts, the role that caste and class play in Indian society, as well as the status attained by professional Indian immigrants here intensifies this “othering” processes, producing increased suburbanisation and an avoidance of Devon by more affluent Indians. While South Asian communities seek to establish a visible connection to Devon, many of their members strive to sever ties with the enclave in order to disassociate themselves from lower status community members.

The changing store fronts in the time I spent in Chicago and more vigorously when I was exploring the place for its Indianness gave me enormous
indication of the consumption patterns of Indians. When I spoke to Mr. Patel (of the Patel Brothers) who owned one of the earliest establishment in the area, he told me that "most shops here earlier were combination shops...they included everything that Indians needed...like Indian groceries, things they carried as gifts when they went home ...like electric appliances etc., the shops had suitcases, calling cards, magazines etc., just about everything any Indian needed. But now you have speciality shops" (emphasis mine). Even in the four years time that I had been visiting the place I noticed that Devon Avenue was changing, some stories have started to become more specialised. There are huge stores now that sell only sarees. I noticed too that the number of Indian jewelry shops has also increased. One of the shoppers, who has been coming to Devon avenue for the last 12 years said that earlier "we came here to buy essentials for Indian kitchen, magazines etc. clothing and other things we bought from India ...when we visited India, but now you get practically everything on Devon Avenue...even things that are hard to find in Indian metropolis....you get them all in one place". Devon Avenue thus acts as one big department store that caters to various ethnicities of India. But the place itself is space for congregations, a symbolic place of Indian community. Thus, on occasions such as India's Independence Day parade, Indians from around Chicago congregate to feel and experience India.

The pictures above are some of the signs of the way the subcontinent is felt and inhabited in Devon Street, catering to various ethnicities and regional differences. It is a place where all the diffusions and singularities of Indianess come to settle in one place. So much so if one were to look for all that is of the sub-continent one will come to Devon Street. And thus it becomes a field in itself that plays out the way of life of the diaspora in the greater Chicago region and in fact the Midwest region of the US. This is a place where people come for congregations, communitarian celebrations like the Indian Independence day celebration. In a more self conscious multicultural Chicago
where neighbourhoods are celebrated and in keeping with multicultural discourse, a parade and procession are typically taken out celebrating the ethnic pride. Multiculturalism permits, even demands, the construction of a *public* ethnic identity (as opposed to a purely private one), which manifests the “authentic” culture that all groups are expected to possess (Taylor 1992). Mitch Berbrier (1998, 2002) points out that multiculturalism legitimises the expression of “heritage preservation” and “ethnic pride”, but also of “ethnic victimisation” among minority groups and that ethnic identification has become an important and acceptable source of cultural capital in contemporary America. Parades are *de rigueur* in Chicago; many ethnicities celebrate their origins and ethnicities by taking out parades in areas where there is concentration of their community.

India too celebrates its nationality and pride by wearing their tri-colours on their sleeves, by showcasing a slice of culture. For the 2007 Independence day which was celebrated, not so incidentally on 18th of August, which happened to be a weekend and not on the 15th of August. The main attraction for the younger generation was *mela* (fair/carnival) with Indian food, and *dhol* (a percussion drum played mainly for bhangra) players. Many of the young Indians came there with some of their American friends who came to witness the parade, a sort of carnivalesque atmosphere was created that showed the Indian ethnic pride.

Closely following in the heels of national pride is the marked presence of regional and different ethnicities. In the picture above, for instance the float is taken out by the Indo-American centre, but close behind is a banner that is seen, which shows the presence of a Bengali community of Chicago.
Indian Independence Day Parade on Devon Avenue

Devon avenue thus is a space where regional identities with their banners and floats, shops and organisation make their presence known. This can be seen on the podium where different organisations play out a power game of trying to vie for the longest sound bytes that they can. There is a struggle to be in close proximity to the power corridor by inviting the alder man of the ward (50th Ward) or a congress man, especially during community celebrations such as the national parade or diwali. There are expressions of power plays between organisation that reflect intra-national differences, but also expressions of the role that organisation play in the larger politics of the country.
Devon avenue is also the place where every day concerns and survival needs of the community are aired out and located. There are posting on store fronts, in windows, etc advertisements looking for work... seeking nannies, announcements for religious discourses, yoga courses, tailors for sari blouses etc.

6.2.2 Places of Worship

Apart from Devon avenue the other places which have congregation element that reflect the diasporic life are the temples. Chicago area has many temples, which are well known in the Midwest. The most well known temples in the greater Chicago are: Sri Venkateshvara Temple, at Arora, BAPS Shree Swaminarayan Mandir at Bartlett, Hindu Temple of Central Illinois Peoria, Shirdi Sai Temple Hampshire, Swami Narayan Mandir, Itasca, Shirdi Sai Baba Mandir Chicago-Sai Samsthan USA, Aurora, Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago Lemont, Hindu Mandir of Lake County GraysLake, Hindu Temple Urbana, Urbana, Manav Seva Mandir Bensonville, Bensonville, Swami
Vivekananda Society, Hyde Park Blvd. Chicago, Yogi Divine Society, Yeoman St. The temple construction substantially increased, when the generation who immigrated in the 60s and 70s had to confront the reality of socialising the young in to ‘Indian culture and tradition’. They then started to think of introducing temples on American landscape. With growing number of Indian immigrants who became settlers, the temple construction saw a growth in the late 80s and 90s (see Fenton, 1988; Williams, 1992; Vertovec, 2000; Kurien, 2007). Initially people made do with any temple, that may have included an ISCKON temple but as ethnic community numbers swelled the temples became more regional in orientations, Sometimes even combining two religions in one as some Gujarati temples have a section for the Jain community as well.

The temples and associated religious organisational places, in Midwest, are more than mere places for worship. In many ways they are beginning to resemble the church in the way they organise themselves in congregational way. In my visit to temples, I found that the shlokas (hymns) being uttered are printed out and handed out to devotees. In the Sri Venkateshwara Temple, at least when I visited, the handouts were in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi. Many of the devotees chanted along with the priests. I was feeling quite out of place despite my printed handout guiding me. I found myself at odds having never chanted along with priests. I also found that the temples invited devotees from the neighbouring counties or suburbs to participate in ritual observations by singing for archana etc. In contrast, priestly temples in India do not traditionally operate in a congregational mode; the daily puja ceremonies held at temples attract many worshipers, but they do not necessarily embrace structures, such as communal chanting, that promote a sense of congregational unison. The temples also hold Sunday classes usually revolving around religious discourse such as Veda classes or Bhagavadgita classes, much like Sunday School of Christian Church. As distinct from their Indian
counterparts, these temples do attempt to foster a sense of community among Hindus, although, as distinct from ISKCON, they tend to do so along ethnic and cultural lines. Rituals therein were performed in the correct traditional style by priests who were brought over from India specifically for that purpose. Then as now, the priests tend to be from south India, especially the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, in keeping with the identity of the majority of worshipers at the temple. However, the priests speak a variety of Indian languages, including those of north India, so that they can serve all worshipers.

The temples are clearly and self consciously involved in secular and non religious life of the community. The temples now relate to the life of the diaspora in the West by trying to cater to their anxieties and everyday concerns of living in the US. Thus, not only do Valentine's Day or Mother's Day feature in the temples programme but also activities that resonate Indianess like bhajans and ghazals, as in the programme from the Rama Temple below. Indian Many temples have extended the self-help, spiritual activities even further by addressing specific needs of the various age groups for instance the Rama Temple at Arora has special programs for youth called “In the Wings”. The Rama temple website (http://htgc.org ) has this to say about the programme:

Along with promoting religious and social interaction, ITW also functions as a network within the Indian community. This is because people can always rely on the ITW group to be there for them. There are always discussion groups, counselors, speakers, and priests, as well as the new friends that ITW members will make, that are willing to discuss the problems in their lives. Furthermore, ITW teaches our youth to work together as a TEAM. This occurs throughout the organisation of the events and participating in each of the events.
itself. In addition, while working and participating with others, young adults are bound to make great friendships, meet new people and enhance their old friendships.

Similarly, they have programmes for young adults and senior citizens. Below is a section of the programmes on offer for senior citizens.

**Seniors' Party!**

*for devotees of age 55 and above*
*(younger devotees are also welcome)*

**Date/Time:** Every 2nd Sunday 3 PM – 5 PM  
**Venue:** Rama Temple Auditorium

**Program for 2007**

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<th>Month</th>
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<td>January 13th</td>
<td>Bhajans</td>
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<td>February 10th</td>
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<td>March 9th</td>
<td>Spirituality in Daily Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 13th</td>
<td>Bhajan</td>
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<td>May 11th</td>
<td>Mother's Day Special <strong>CANCELLED!!</strong></td>
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Nearly all the temples had halls to accommodate the devotees and participants in various programmes on offer. The halls can also be hired for weddings and
various festivities. In one of my visits around Vijaya Dashami, to a smaller temple in the neighbourhood, I noticed that the halls were nearly completed booked by various cultural organisations. At some points there were simultaneous events happening in the halls: the Durga Puja pandals (canopies for placing the Durga idol) were being set up along with preparations for cultural events for the pooja, the Gujarathi associations were organising a gharba event. The Tamil organization had a small gollu (a doll show that is part of Vijaya Dashami celebrations) placed to mark the occasion. Most temples try to serve the various ethnic and regional populations of India, by including deities from north Indian tradition or by using Sanskrit for liturgy. However many temples tend to slant either towards south Indian style or a north Indian, depending on who are the main patrons or the board members who have contributed towards the construction of temples.

These temples have become sites of much of community activities for the Indian diaspora. The facilities like halls and auditoria are used by various communities to celebrate cultural events and festivities. Besides, temples are also the venues for much of family oriented rituals such as the life-cycle rituals. It is quite common, as I found out that many families that I interviewed had some or other life-cycle ceremony, especially the minor ones, performed in the temple precincts with special pooja being offered for the occasion.

These two areas of congregation are the intersecting sub-social fields where the diasporic life is examined. Coming to the main themes through which we are going to examine the consumption that surrounds lifecycle rituals we will start by discussing the family in the larger context of American society.
6.3 The Indian Family in the US

In the course of my fieldwork I discovered that most of the immigrant families that I talked to used family networks to migrate to US. Many narrated to me about networks of ties that helped their relatives to migrate. Many Indians who moved to America came through ethnic and family migratory networks. The literature on migration studies and diasporic studies, especially in the last decade or so, have pointed out to the existence of networks that greatly aid the movement and migration of people (Bozorgmer, 1990; Portes and Borocz, 1989; Fawcett,1989;Boyd, 1989; Wilperst and Gitmez,1987) Massey defines migration networks as “sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants and non migrants in origin and destination areas through bonds of kinship, friendship and shared community origin” (1988:396). The Indian population in US has grown substantially in the last decade, there is 106 % growth from 1990 to 2000, according to the US Census. This growth is also due to policy initiatives, such as increased H1B visas in the silicon boom period, but migratory networks have a huge bearing on the families migrating to US. While there may be unassisted migrations every now and then, “decades of research have shown that the decision to migrate or to stay, the selection of destination, and the adjustment process at destination are massively influenced by ethnic, kinship, workmate neighbor, and friendship networks in which people participate” (Ivan Light et al, 1993:26).

A Punjabi family -- the Aroras were one such family that exemplified how networks play a role in the migration of various family members. The Aroras that I met in Chicago, is clan of 300 members, which includes booth blood relatives and affinal relatives. This does not include the family friends, from the village etc. This goes to show how Indian families are very expansive and are not exclusively nuclear in form. It is not uncommon for parents or parents-
in-law to arrive for lengthy stays, or for nieces, nephews or the children of cousins to be informally adopted into US households for the duration of their college-going years, as they are in India. The open expansiveness of the Indian family may not be its most unique feature, but it is one of the most enduring. The children of the Indian diaspora can expect their parents to be involved in their lives, to contribute to college tuition and living expenses, to help them find marriage partners, help them set up new homes and assist them with new babies. The migrant relatives are often the major source of social capital, which is used by the non-migrant for social mobility. We did mention how the marriage to NRI Indian is often a sure way of seeking better life and climb in social position (Simons, 1999; Shaw, 2000a; Paliriwal and Uberoi, 2007:x, see also Xiang 2005; Gallo 2005).

They serve as the basis of social capital, which is very useful for a diasporic community. This carved social capital not only helps fight discrimination in the 'host' society but also help negotiate diasporic identity and sets in social mobility.

The family as a central organising force, a network and a source of social capital becomes a leitmotif of Indian identity expressions, especially in a society that seeks individualism, such as America. I have often heard the families that I have interviewed, say how they feel proud to be Indian with their tradition of family. One of my informants said “we Indians take care of each other’….old people are not left to fend for themselves, as here (US) but respected and taken care of.” This idea of Indian family is itself an idealisation (not everyone elder parent is being taken care, for instance), but it does serve as recognisable aspect of Indian communities in the US. I was told by a suburban mom, Shobha, in Schaumburg, that the parents (mostly white Americans, she added) of the children in her sons school tell her “how Indian
families seem to have it all” One parent told her, to quote her “you guys (Indians) have big houses, best cars, parents who come to baby sit for you, husbands who don’t seem to leave you and on top of that the kids who do super good at school”. And she added but “we Indians are under compulsion to prove to the white people we are no less than them and in many cases better than them. We do well professionally but, at the same time, are able to retain our traditional value for family”.

The successful Indian professional with their cars and nerdy children is by now well exemplified and found in real and imaginary characters that are beginning to be seen in consumptive public arena of media. The few Indians who are seen in media, such as TV serials, cartoon strips, film etc., are typically seen as either convenient store owners, like Apu in the Simpsons series, or as professionals and nerdy adults or children as in Ashok of Dilburt, or a predictable Indian doctor occasionally seen in TV or film. The Indian family as the source of performance and success orientation is further corroborated by documentary films such as Spellbound\textsuperscript{75}, where highly competitive parents push their children to perform, while enveloping them with loving care.

The nerdy Indian professionals with their equally nerdy children have derisive value in larger America, where a nerd is typically a socially inept, unpopular book worm who does not have much of a social life. However, the success that is visible among the professional Indians is lauded. And the fact that the

\textsuperscript{75} The documentary film Spellbound (2000), which won an academy award, chronicles young children who are preparing for the spelling contest. It is not really about spelling, but about hopes and dreams of the families and their children. It is interesting how different families have different approaches; all the way from hands-off parents to parents hiring drill coaches. The Indian parents here are seen as extremely pressuring and ambitious yet loving. I heard some Americans say, when talking about the movie that Indian families seem to put too much pressure on their children and that they “felt bad that the kids seem to have no life”.
family is behind the success is valorised, despite the fact that the said family is often seen as archaic and controlling in the way they bring up their children. The idea of family, in any case, is highly affirmed and idealised in American society, at least in the public arena.

6.3.1 The Idealization and Dysfunctionality of Family in America

Despite the dysfunctionality that is cited as malaise of post world-war American society, the idea of family continues to be valorised. The ideal family in America is embodied in the 'companionship marriage' which emerges with the emergence of democratic civil society exemplified by individualism, consumerism which is different from an earlier duty bound overtly patriarchal model. Cheale (1999) argues that the idea of companion marriage was an important antidote to the encroaching values of individualism. Burgess and Locke comments that the socially isolated companionship family life had to be reconfigured on the basis of interpersonal relationship and mutual affection and understanding. This was done through the help of many agencies and experts, psychologist, family counseling centers as well a host of institutions agencies etc. Deborah Chambers brings out the way the popular media in America idealises the nuclear companionship based family of suburbia by examining Hollywood movies, TV serials and the rise of familial consumerism and the production of familiness by the families themselves. Chambers says that the flipside of the idealised consumerist ideal suburbanite is the dysfunctional family that is a constant threat to the institution of family. She writes;

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76 This aspect of Indian parenting and family control was not only voiced by the second generation Indian children but also by many Americans that I spoke to. This generational difference are a staple of many cross over movies such as Bend it like Beckham, Bhaji on the Beach and American Desi, to name a few.
Embedded within the sign of privatised, consumerised, feminised and spectacularised ideal family lurks its other; the dysfunctional family form. The modern functional family cannot operate effectively as regulatory ideal without inventing the idea of being under siege from deeply disruptive forces. The dysfunctional family, and its individual members, act as a counterfoil, as permanent reminder of the need to fight for the preservation of ideal as more than a myth, as something that once existed and must be recovered. This pathological form signifies the demise of the 1950s male breadwinner model and rise of postmodern instability, diversity and deviation. The nuclear ideal is invented and reinvented (Chambers, 2001:66).

Lynn Spiegel argues that the family life was portrayed in terms of spectacle and theatre. The theatricality of family life was played out and established in mid 19th century across America, though popular media forms, from magazines to film, radio, and television dramas. “The number of factors that converge within models of popular culture during the early twentieth century that set the scene for future patterns of representation” (Chambers, 2001:74).

We have been talking about the diversity and dysfunctionality of postmodern family. Chambers says that “the traditional family can no longer be applied to the postmodern situation. The new postmodern family is situated outside the modern paradigm of universal reason and progress and as such is shaped by the experience of pluralism, disorder and fragmentation within contemporary culture”. Chambers says that the postmodern family is spectacularised in media, but wonders if this new form is upstaging modern nuclear family. She believes that the new forms “do not necessarily undermine modern family values discourse even though they may be transcending such values. On the contrary they seem to run parallel to, as well as in tension with, white nuclear
family. She further argues that the emergence of postmodern families or hybrid families is generating interest on the issue of family, giving rise to "recuperation of family values as such. Some of the recovering is happening via the right wing discourse she argues.

6.3.2 The Indian Family: A Tradition and a Value

The Indian family is set against this backdrop of contesting discourses of companionship based nuclear family of the white American suburbia, and the new postmodern hybrid family which questions the very essence of marriage, family, sexuality and gender through same sex marriages, single parenting new practices of adoption etc. Additionally, for the new migrants there was the baggage of cultural and traditional practices that they carried from home.

Nearly almost all the migrants who moved to the US in the 60s either as students or as professionally employed looked to home for a bride. Most of the migrants in that period happened to be men. Many of the people I interviewed, who migrated in the 60s and subsequently married with families had arranged marriages. The marriage of this kind certainly was not marriage based on 'companionship and egalitarian principles' but was based on duty and gender based hierarchies, though a tad different, as some of them said, from their parent’s marriage. In the sense that women could seek employment if they so desired and in America it was easier to do so. This of course meant that the women did enjoy a certain easy companionship and relative freedom, but the family and marriage was largely modeled on the traditional practices

77 The major influx of Indians arrived in Chicago, as professionals and as graduates under the Immigration and National Act of 1965. As with many immigrants men arrived without their families. Since they were the early migrants they did not have the networks and support of families who had migrated earlier. They had to test the waters before they could bring their family to the new country. Many who moved to the US as graduate students were single, who went to find jobs, the next step they took was to find wife back home and bring her back on a dependent visa.
of gendered hierarchy, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman the main child-rearer and homemaker. Some of them explored the option of looking for employment that was not necessarily career oriented and that did not come in the way of them “being there to take care of the kids”. As Padma Rangaswamy puts it in her book that studied Indians in Chicago, “this ambivalence between home and career is managed by each woman in her own way but their deep seated unease with the inevitable compromise is apparent” (Rangaswamy, 2000:156).

Socialised to look at herself as the main childrearer and a cultural bearer, the women who came to the US in 60s and 70s found themselves looking at the family life and marriage in America as individualising and atomised, however democratic. As one suburban resident put it: (many women echoed similar sentiments)

We don’t want to raise our children like American children who argue with their parents. Also, unlike our parents who gave us so much and sacrificed so much for us, parents here let go of their children. They hardly help their children once they cross a certain age. I can not say that they have no bonds but it is so different from the Indian families whose ties are so strong. You have to give completely, it is only then you will be respected and cared for and admired by your children. But that does not mean that they can do what they want like some of the American teenagers. They have to be told and guided, controlled sometimes. In the end they will really appreciate that we have given them Indian values and family. I am proud we have the family tradition in India and we take care of each other.

This loving care given by parents that my respondent was talking about is set within the moral and traditional parameters of Indian culture and it is a
recurrent theme and cause of tension between first generation Indians and their children who are growing up in the US. But for the migrant parents, pitted as they are against the individualistic oriented family system of America, and intense isolation in an alien land, with no careers and life outside the family to throw themselves in to, many women, particularly the 60s and 70s generation, threw themselves with passion in to inculcating the value of family and Indian tradition to their children. The family thus was invested with emotions and time, born out of nostalgia of home and their own growing up memories. Thus, every opportunity was seized to gather the family to celebrate the togetherness. It is little wonder that more than any other tradition, Indian Immigrants have taken to certain American traditions without any hitch like Thanksgiving and Christmas and where possible to also incorporate such ceremonies as mother’s day, father’s day, baby showers. Baby showers may not always involve family members but to some of the women, who did not have too many friends in an alien land or an extended community, the close band of women friends – a few American friends but mostly Indian friends – gathering to celebrate motherhood was a way of reliving memories of extended kin of home and forming bondages through such occasions in a new land.

As the number of Indians increased the various other institutions and business also sprang up that catered to the everyday needs of Indians. By late 80s and 90s, the number temples increased substantially. The Harvard pluralism project has listed 727 Hindu temples and centres in 2005 (www.pluralism.org). The rising number of temples coincided with the generation of Indians who felt the acute need to transmit Indian culture to their children.

78 I often heard women talk of their parents and how they took care of them. A mother’s untiring love and care that expressed itself in her cooking them their favourite food and being there at home at all times was remembered, with the rose tinted glasses of nostalgia.
In addition to the needs of children, there were also others under consideration; an increasing number of retirees - older immigrants who had more leisure - and parents of immigrants brought over under the family reunification provision. When the succeeding wave of immigrants arrived, there was already a visible cultural and social presence of the Indian community in the way they affirmed Indianess or their ethnicities through various cultural and social expressions – music, dance, temples, restaurants, movies, Indian clothing, spiritual and religious discourse, books etc, on aspects of Indian cultures – that provided renewable continuity with traditions in India.

When I was doing fieldwork in Chicago and its suburbs, the Indian community had expanded in all its manifestation; in volume, in its sectarian representations in the way they celebrated and renewed their Indian culture. In the families I interacted with and interviewed. I came across not only the ones who migrated in the 60s and 70s but also in the 80s and 90s or as late as 2000s, all part of the same extended family. As I mentioned earlier, migration to the US often was informed through family networks. In the true spirit of transnational space that we were hoping to explore, I found that there could very well be same generation living around the same area, who have been raised completely differently; one in metropolitan of India and another in the suburban of Chicago. Their sense of what Indian culture means to them could be different though they may both be consuming similar events of lifecycle rituals or such family oriented celebrations that expressed Indian tradition.

Not only are there differences in the same generations (intra-generational), though they may seemingly occupy a transnational space of simultaneous consumption, but there are also differences between generations (inter-
generational), that give rise to varying meanings, connotations, contexts and agencies for the actors. Aparna Rayaprol (also Shah 1997; Maira, 1999) recounting the generational differences says how “most of the second generation Indian American seem more articulate about their identities than the previous generations. They have also given considerable thought to issues of race, religion, colour, geographical and social roots, while an unambiguous Indian identity was crucial for their parents’ self definition” (2000:138).

Older generation talked about creating and reliving memories in their early years of migration, in their need to observe rituals. And later when children were young it was important to impart and socialise them into Indian culture. The resistance to these ‘introduction to Indian culture’ are quite pronounced among second generation school going children; for teenagers growing up in America it is bad enough to be sporting an unpronounceable Indian name but to be actually seen in Indian clothes, or doing things which are not cool among their peers is certainly a bane. Not perhaps all of them show this acute resistance, but by and large there is certain underplaying of the Indian identity; a closeted Indian identity, so to say. This is despite the fact that the young people are engaging in classical music lessons or bharatanatyam classes or Sunday classes at the temple. But as the young adult grows older and has children of her own there is an evidence of interest in Indian culture. As one lady who moved to Chicago in early 70s, after she got married to her academic husband, recounts:

At that time we could not do much as nothing was available...no priests, no samagri (objects and paraphernalia) that you required for

79 Having Indian names can often mean being teased at school or among your peers. I have heard many teenagers express the angst of not being part of their peer group. The name as a reference point and site of contestation between parents and their cultural mornings and the young adults desire to be part of the mainstream are beautifully brought out in the novel Namesake by Jumpha Lahari, which is now also a successful movie directed by Meera Nair.
any kind of pooja or samskar. In the late 60s when we moved here there were nothing, hardly any Indian... no stores, one barely ran in to any Indian. Now of course you don’t have to go to India all that you get in India is here... sometimes better... I would say. My son had a full mundane ceremony for my grandson in the temple. He decided to throw the ceremony not because I wished it, but he wished to have for his son all the things that I could not do for him. In fact his cousins who have recently moved from Delhi are surprised with his familiarity and I can say dedication to Indian culture and tradition.

Prema Kurien (see Maira 1999; Rayaprol, 2000) writing about the growing Hindu Identity consciousness among the second generation Hindu Americans writes;

Second-generation Hindu Americans face the difficult task of straddling their parent’s culture and that of the wider society, confronting racism, and dealing with the opportunities and pressures of multiculturalism. Hinduism and “Indianness” have seemed to become particularly significant in this process with many Hindu American youth ....Many of the teenagers and college students with whom I spoke with described the pain they experienced growing up with “brown skins” in a predominantly white environment (generally , the first generation preferred to avoid talking about race altogether). They said that their eagerness to be accepted had initially led them to turn away from their Indianness and try to be as much like their white friends as possible. Rejecting their roots, however only increased their identity crisis and feeling of alienation, since it became obvious to them that no matter what they did they are never going to be accepted as “just Americans”. The crisis was resolved when they accepted their heritage and began to learn more about Hinduism and Indian culture (2007:57).
The set of circumstances, contexts and motivations for the first generation and the second generation are different and so is their sense of agency. The self-consciousness on the part of the second generations Indian Americans to embrace Indian culture and observe rituals is different from their elders. Some of the elders in their family who observed rituals because "that is what we are supposed to do and that is what our forefathers and elders did" said one of my informants. The questioning and trying to understand the sense of the rituals, by the second generation Indian Americans I would like to argue has freed the rituals from the traditional parameters of what ought to be done and how. Now, there is play of imagination in the cornucopia that is Indian culture that is at the disposal of the actors, not only for the younger generation but also for the older generation too. Thus, something like Bollywood dancing sequences may be totally alien to the set of wedding traditions but it is embraced or tolerated by the purist as it celebrates Indianness at the end of it. There are other agencies, institutions and actors that are implicated in offering the cornucopia of Indian culture, to be consumed by the one eager for traditions that speak of Indianess. Two of the agencies that will be talked about in following sections are the market and the media, the business and the selling of culture that is media mediated and creates desires and feeds in to the needs and influences the nature of ritual observances.
6.4 Marketing and Consuming  Culture and Tradition

Recently, on a visit to a south Delhi neighbourhood shopping area, I found there were several holi (the festival of spring that is celebrated with colour) items - like squirt guns - that were made in China. Earlier on, I found Chinese made Ganesh idols and what looked like Shiva idols. It is quite obvious that these are made specifically for the Indian market. India is now considered one of the major markets that everyone who wants to sell anything looks to India for a piece of that market. Things that are specifically consumed by Indians are no more restricted to Indians who live in India alone. Bollywood of late has discovered that Indians exist outside of India who would also like to consume all that spells home and an Indian way of life.

The NRI (read the Indians in America) are known to be successful and wealthy. One of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the US, Indian Americans, increased from 815,000 in 1990 to nearly 1.9 million in 2000, a 133 percent rise, per the Census Bureau. Even so, that group makes up less than 1 percent of the total U.S. population compared to the Latino community, which made up 12.5 percent in 2000. Both figures have no doubt have risen since then. "The South-Asian and especially the Indian-American numbers will show another marked increase in the 2010 census. And even though they represent just a fraction of the Latino population, South Asians have disposable income in the area of $90 billion," says Shah, whose estimate is based on the $76 billion figure the market research firm Cultural Access Group arrived at in its 2005 report. "What the South Asians lack in size, they make up for with purchasing power." (Ouellette, 2005, source: http://www.adweek.com).
6.4.1 Spirituality and Materiality

With huge disposable incomes Indian Americans are certainly being noticed as big spenders. Earlier the Indian oriented publication such as *India Abroad*, *India Post*, *Desi Talk*, *Little India* to name a few had very South Asia oriented advertisements. They were contributed mainly by south Asian business, small posts and advertisements for legal services, wedding videography, restaurant etc. This is however changing lately, as one finds mainstream American big business advertising in this publication. "The number of ad pages in South-Asian print has increased to staggering levels. And within the past two years, the advertising has begun to come from outside the South-Asian marketing community. Companies like The Home Depot, *The New York Times Magazine*, Mercedes-Benz, Volvo and Delta Airlines are all advertising to this audience (ibid)."

In a place like America, with its many ethnic populations the food industry in particular has always tried to cater to the ethnic needs. Food habits are often seen as a fundamental way of shoring up a sense of ethnic/community identity (Brown and Mussell 1984). Pillsbury, an American based food corporation, for instance, was quick to see a huge catchment in the Indian population and has started to make packaged, pre-made foods like *phulkas* and *paranthas*. Pillsbury flour is now becoming a staple in urban India, in places like Delhi. Pillsbury is one example of ethnicisation of markets that are a feature of global capitalism, which works on the principle of segmented and localised production that caters to local needs and tastes (We talked about this aspect of global capitalism in our second chapter in detail). Similarly, big business
houses from India like ITC, who have launched their own packaged foods, are not too far behind in trying to reach not only the Indian populations but also the global cosmopolitan consumer who likes to taste a bit of every culture (see Bell and Valentine, 1997).

Food is not the only marker and most revered part of cultural habit. Other artifacts, ways of doing are similarly marketed and consumed. With the increasing global connections it is easier for the artifacts, images and services to reach the audience, who is desirous of a way of doing things, not only as a way of remembering days gone by but also as way of marking out a difference from others.

For the well-heeled Indian, who lives in the many suburbs of Chicago, it is both important to merge in terms of spelling out to others that they can do as well as any white American but also maintain a distinct identity that sets them apart from other who are not white, like Blacks and even Hispanics. At the same time, living in the suburbs the professional Indian with three-garage American homes would not want to wear the Indian identity on his/her sleeve. They do not want to be mistaken with the working class Indian, who are typified by their fresh off the boat accents and largely Indian habits, attire or general lifestyle. Vijay Prashad brings out the dilemmas and inherent racially informed prejudices of the south Asian Indians in America in his book *Karma of Brown Folk*, the book considers the peculiar dilemmas of the South Asian condition around the globe. As Prashad, explains, 'the costs of being a model minority includes a capitulation to the ideology of white superiority, trepidation about forging alliances across class, ethnic, or religious

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80 I have often times found that the choice of habitation for many Indians is compelled by the fact that as soon as a place becomes unexclusive then their indications of having reached diminish then it is time to move to more expensive, more gentrified neighbourhoods often times bordering on a rich white (WASP) neighbourhoods.
boundaries, and a willingness to be used as a silent symbol in the rollback of social-justice initiatives like welfare and affirmative action.

The real lives of South Asians -- in the diaspora or on the subcontinent -- are complex, multifaceted, and filled with creative compromises. At one level, there is an easy acceptability of the material comforts that America or for that the liberalised India has to offer. Yet, there is the constant (partly guilt ridden) denial of the materiality by pursuits of what seems other worldly and things that hark back to the so called spiritual and tradition bound roots of home. The orientalist notion of Indian as land of spirituality and non material pursuits is something that many of the people I spoke with believed in and reveled in. However, there is no implacable conflict between "tradition" and "modernity," and not even a clear line between the two. Both have lent themselves to suit to the demands and needs of the Indians abroad. Starkly modern developments -- like the internet -- promote what we might call "tradition."; without e-mail and web pages, half of the arranged marriages in US might never have occurred.

6.4.2 Web Marketing and Culture Services

The World Wide Web has made the world very porous for goods, ideas images to flow through. The internet and new technologies have been used by all kinds of business to reach areas that were hitherto not possible. Anyone

81 While the racist tendency among the Indian Populations is largely true, there has been an attempt to forge some sort of alliance with the black population of late, but the identification has been mainly by second generation urban populations who have their version of hip-hop, dubbed desi hiphop. One wonders though whether they want to ride the hip cool expression or it spells a genuine alliance. But according to Sunaina Maira of UC Davis, a more nuanced analysis would suggest that Black music provides young South Asians with a powerful critique of mainstream middle-class Anglo-Saxon America as well as with an elaborate vocabulary for airing feelings of marginality. Maira argues that for Indian American youth, "the turn to hip hop is not always based on clearly articulated political dissent or moral outrage", but may be "bound up with struggles over what it means to be Indian in the United States, racially and in terms of class aspirations." (Source: http://www.indolink.com/Living/America/).
and everyone who has something to offer are on the net. Religious organisations are not far behind. They may not seem the ideal stereotypical business enterprise but many religious organisations are refashioning themselves to modern world by adopting technologies in innovative ways. And in this reorientation to modern times both home and abroad come together in networks that make the temples a viable option. The services have become globally evolved, as in the way priests are trained for instance.

As Temples become the sites of congregation and a place for the performances of the life-cycle rituals, it is interesting to note that Hindu Temples in US have become very technology savvy and they are structured around highly instrumental orientations. Religion, spirituality and tradition, 

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82 According to Rajan Bedi, reporting for BBC (online 25th July 2000) Hindu priest have taken to spreading their activities worldwide much like Christian missionaries. Many of them, he reports, are trained at Hindu Heritage Prashishtan, Modipurum-a small town near Delh. He writes that they are trained in scriptures, and have a working knowledge of English, in a nine month course, at the end of which the priests are awarded a diploma. “Over the years Hindu religious organisations and temple trusts like the Temple Society in North America and the South Indian Religious Society in Singapore have "imported" Brahmin priests from India. The Hindu Temple Society said the proliferation of Hindu temples overseas has proved to be a godsend for Indian priests eager to move to richer pastures. And although overseas Hindu religious organisations play a major role in importing priests, many manage to secure appointments through networking skills and personal contacts”.

83 It is very evident in the way the Hindu temples are organised in the US. Since they operate in a setting that is largely ruled by certain instrumental and rational ordering, simple things such as timings for archana, fee structure or the general ambience of the temple and organisations are run in a very ordered fashion.

Here is a list of temple fee structure and items needed for pooja (source; Balaji Temple, www.balaji.org)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pooja Name</th>
<th>In Temple</th>
<th>Outside Temple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aksharabyasam</td>
<td>$51</td>
<td>$175 $250 $250 $400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annaprasanam</td>
<td>$51</td>
<td>$175 $250 $250 $400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gruhapravesham</td>
<td></td>
<td>$175 $250 $250 $400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair-offering</td>
<td>$51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman-vadamala-seva (Tuesdays only)</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman-Akumala Puja***</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman-kadali pazzha mala (Banana mala)**</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in this age of networking and global flows have certainly used modern mass media and new information technologies to reach larger audiences and lend themselves to changing scenarios. Thus you can have virtual internet poojas that are being offered by temples and religious organisations. There are many web sites, which offer this virtual poojas and prarthanas. One of the sites has this blog entry: “thank for the gentle pooja ride, greatly appreciated. I had the real smell of incense as I clicked on virtual real reality” (from http://ridingtheastralplane.blogspot.com/2007/07/virtual-pooja.). An interesting thing to be found on the eprarthana.com is that you could choose the place of worship by going on to window which gives the options of temples located in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. The fee varies according to the kind of pooja that one chooses, there is a shopping cart button for that. For something as geographically specific as the choice of your temple, interestingly the payment structure is listed in dollars. The global reach of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalyana Utsavam</td>
<td>$101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namakaranam</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sathyanarayana Swami Puja</td>
<td>$75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding*</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homam (Ganapathy/ Sudarshan etc.)</td>
<td>$251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayushyahomam</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vahana Puja/ Car Puja</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seemantham*</td>
<td>$151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upanayanam*</td>
<td>$151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashtiabthapoorthi*</td>
<td>$251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjal seva</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman-Vennai Alankaram (Mondays only)</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhishekam</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhishekam for Sri Balaji*</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navagraha Puja/ Shanthi/ Homa</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punyahavachanam</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shardhams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiranya shardham</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinda Shardham</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

these sites is indicative of the fact that currency in usage is dollars. In some of these sites like eprarthana for instance, there were advertisements for temples in the US.

The virtual participation is not just limited to pooja that can be offered online, some enterprising wedding planners have webcasting of the marriage ceremony that is live. shadionline.com, a wedding portal with a corporate office in Delhi with branches in US, and the UK is one such site. They advertise, among their many services, for webcasting. It reads as: “live on the internet via Shaadionline’s Interactive Web TV. Share the video of your wedding live with friends and family across the world via streaming on the Internet. Inviting them to participate in this live Webcast without being physically present” (shadionline.com).

I have often heard many of the Indian families that I interviewed say that you can get all the material comforts from this land but nothing to nourish the soul. For this they look to India for answers. With increasing transnational flows catering to the needs of the Indians in America it has become easy. There are numerous business ventures which sell artifacts, ideas, services that target Indian Americans. With possibility of e-commerce you do not have to have actual physical presence in any one place. As we already mentioned in our previous chapter, the various services and providers for traditional events such as weddings, funerals etc, can all be accessed through the internet.

For the Indian community, in the US, the internet if anything is one of the chief ways in which people procure objects and services for those special events. Here is an extract from the website garmacha.com that caters to practically every possible need of the Indian community living in the US. The post below seems to be located in San Francisco but several such sites have an inventory of services available in various regions.
I am from California (San Francisco) and my engagement is on 14th Jun' 08. I was wondering if you can provide me information on where/how can I buy traditional Indian cloths like sherwani/kurta etc either online/stores. If possible please give me the websites/address so that I can order it ASAP and they deliver before June 14.

thanks in advance,
Sid

Our Response to Sid:

Dear Sid,
Firstly Congrats on your engagement!
Many Saree shops and boutiques listed on GaramChai.com also serve Gentlemen like you. Please review and contact them directly… alternatively, you may call then and visit them if they are near where you live in San Francisco
http://www.garamchai.com/saree.htm

Regards
Suja

The web is replete with such sites and requests for information not only where to procure a said item for ritual purposes, but queries about how a ritual ought to be performed and various other queries related to it. A website that attends to different parenting needs of Indians across the globe has these comments on message board:

Name: APatel
Country: U.S.A.
Comment:
Teresa - you aren't in a position the give a traditional Indian babys shower as you are not the girl's mother or mother-in-law. Though I am sure she would not mind having a second American baby shower for fun. We are having two, one traditional one his mother will host and one for us with our American, Indian, and all other friends - as we have friends from all over the world. Good Luck.

Name: APatel
Country: U.S.A.
Comment:
I am white and married to a wonderful Gujarati man. I have lasted just fine. Please remember we are all individuals, no matter where we were originally from. My Srimantham will be hosted by my mother in law. These things seem to vary from state to state and town to town. It is nice to see a forum on this subject for reference since there is such variety and little literature on the subject as compared to weddings. Jai Shree Krishna.

As can be seen from the above comments posted on a website, frequented by Indians or the ones married to Indians that they want to sometimes follow Indian customs. Some of the traditions that are already in place are blended in to the general rubric of what is considered "following an Indian traditions or culture". In my interviews I have often seen that many Indian to be mothers combine the American tradition of baby showers with godhbarna. Depending on the circumstances or who is involved -- the chief participants or audiences -- the ceremonies tone or style is made suitable. It is not so much that authenticity has to be maintained as much as the fact that the performance of a ritual must convey a certain message. Rituals have been analysed from many angels and they have been identified to be largely in constant state of changes and modifications. Schechner in his book the Future of Rituals writes; 
"Rituals have been considered: 1) as a part of the evolutionary development of animals; 2) as structures with formal qualities and definable relationships; 3) as symbolic systems of meaning 4) as performative actions or processes; 5) as experiences. These categories overlap. It is also clear that rituals are not safe deposits vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in a new way" (Schechner, 1993:228).
In the American context, wedding planners already have a well established tradition of offering their services as the ‘solution’ for modern career women. Because of the excessive demands and long hours of the work day, ‘modern career women’ are too busy to cope with the endless details of planning and organising a wedding. Without compromising on the ‘institutionalised’ feminist ideals of career, success, independence, and ‘equality’ in the division of domestic labour, the career women could still be a part of family events in an involved way, but with the help of wedding planner. Indian entrepreneurs who realised the growing demand for marriage services. Wedding planners reflect the growing supply of commodified domestic services designed to meet the competing demands of work and domestic life. In the absence of large extended family and kith and kin that become a part of the wedding preparation, the brides and grooms are taking control of the wedding arrangements. The wedding services have become the new way of organising weddings in US, among the Indian families.

In the West, the wedding is chiefly the bride’s day, she has the most say on how the celebrations are to take place. In Indian settings, typically, it is elders who decide what ought to be done. Their reference often was “this is the way it is done traditionally. In the weddings of the generations that is marrying after they have secured an education and profession, the do s and don’t s of wedding are often in the hands of the couple. In some of the weddings that I viewed or attended, the bride and groom often took the lead in deciding what the tone of wedding should be like. I have heard young married ones say that while they are deferential to their elders in following certain traditions or observances. But they want to make the wedding a “fun event” that everyone participates in and enjoys. It is the fun element that has a performance and spectacle orientation that constitutes an ‘Indian Wedding’ in the American
context. Just about every wedding service provider and planner focus on this idea of Indian wedding.

Following the well established marketing and services for wedding that already exist in the US, the Indian entrepreneurs have launched their own wedding services that cater to the Indian populations in general. Thus, any wedding services should be able to not only address the various prominent traditions but also provide the fun party elements that go in to the celebrations. These days weddings have new celebratory items such DJs, choreographed music and dance that is chiefly Bollywood inspired\(^{85}\), and various other elements thrown into it, like cutting of the wedding cake, toasting etc. What mattered was not so much the authenticity of rituals being carried out as much as the audience that was being addressed. The audiences are not necessarily sequestered so the platter of rituals on offer combine various elements; cocktail drinks in gowns, and evening dresses to eating out of banana leaves, covering a spectrum of intersecting worlds that the transnationally disposed professionals habitat.

Priya and Ajit are both professionals who had their wedding celebrations, for most part in Kerala (some celebrations took place in Chicago). The couple is from a Nair community. The pictures above and below were from their wedding ceremonies that went on for four days. Typical Nair weddings are one of shortest ceremonies, but the couple and their families were quite open to incorporating elements, which are alien to their traditional Nair weddings, like sangeet\(^{86}\) and mehendi ceremony

\(^{85}\) Some of the wedding planners combine the Western tradition of groom and bride’s first dance but in a Bollywood style.

\(^{86}\) We mentioned this similar trend in another Nair wedding that I happened to witness, both the weddings I noticed had sangeet and mehendi ceremony. These inclusions, as reiterated by the elders of the family “were never a part of any Nair weddings, but young people like to have fun and so why not” In Priya’s Wedding the guest list was hugely cosmopolitan and some of them had an idea of what an ‘Indian Wedding’ is from movies like Monsoon
These celebrations have their origins in the north Indian wedding. It was/is a tradition among the bride’s relatives to have an event, which are exclusively women oriented, that celebrated marriage through song and dance. The bride would be teased, or told of the possible perils of having mother-in-law, but typically the songs are folk based and often very risqué. That tradition is fast changing to begin with ladies sangeet is 1) no more exclusive to women or to bride’s family anymore 2) not necessarily folk based, often the song and dance are straight lifts from Bollywood complete with the dresses and dance moves from the movies. I have been told in one instance that the sangeet ceremony proved to a big icebreaker for the groom and bride’s family, as they were from different cultures. The groom’s family is from Chicago and the bride grew up in Delhi eventually moving to Chicago.

Wedding and Bend it like Beckham. Priya’s friend from Chicago said “it was a bit like the movies….all that color, the beautiful traditional dresses the ceremonies….there was not as much dancing though”.

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A wedding lunch in Chicago, banana-leaf plates are used for the authentic feel of a traditional wedding.

The orientalised revisiting of so called Indian traditions are celebrated and showcased, particularly to Western audience in transnational settings. Certain aspects of Indian culture or things associated with India such as bindi, bangra or mehendi and now weddings have become unhinged from their cultural and geographical moorings to be free floating agents to be consumed as the exotic other. When celebrities, such as Maddona, Liz Hurley etc. adopt such exotic customs it acquires a cool quotient. The prominence and privileging of these new ‘hip’ cultural artifices in the media have helped internalise the exoticisation of Indian culture further. Not just the Western media but any small item which puts India under spotlight in the world is highlighted in the media in India. Recently, the super model Heidi Klum and singer husband Seal renewed their wedding vows by having a Hindu wedding ceremony, with priest from Banaras flown to perform the sacrament. This was reported in
It is the circulation of news, images and the flow of services for such events that de-territorialise the cultural artifact and traditions to global circulations. The media mediations have a role to play in this.

### 6.5 Media and Culture

An elderly Telugu couple I met in Chicago spent a few months in US with their daughter and another few months in Delhi with their sons. They also have a house in Hyderabad, a part of which is rented out. While each place that they live in is different, what ‘makes the transition easy’ according to them is that their daily life ...such as food they are used to, (whether it is the *avakai* – a mango pickle made with mustard in a typical Andhra style –or gonguru or *sona masuri* rice), their daily pooja *samagri* (items for offering prayers) and their favourite newspaper and channels are all available. Except on rare occasions, they rarely ever miss their four times a week staple of soap from one of the Telugu channels. The viewing time of the soap opera serials coincides with the family dinner, where three generations sit together and discuss the plot of the serials. The sons and daughters and their children are reluctantly drawn in to watching the serials, as it is their grandparents viewing time. I found that the grandchildren –in their teens find “all the women crying too much, making too many sacrifices for the family”, according to the two sets of grandchildren “the women are either doormats or way too evil”. Apart

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87 The report from *Times of India* (5 May, 2008) reads: "To my surprise the couple, their relatives and even the guests were dressed in Banarasi saris, *lehnga-chunni*, *sherwani* and *kurta pyjamas*," recalls a bemused Tripathi, (a priest from Banaras) who returned from Mexico on Friday. Barring the language, everything about the function was Indian — be it food or the dress code. A chef had been specially flown in from California to prepare Indian cuisine. "The *mandap* prepared for the occasion was extensively decorated with Banarasi saris," Tripathi told TOI. "Klum looked like a typical Indian bride in lehnga-chunni with traditional ornaments while Seal wore a black ‘sherwani’. It took almost one-and-a-half hours to complete the wedding rituals like *Ganesh pujan, Navgrah pujan, phere, kanyadaan* and *paon pujai.*" He said that *paon pujai* (washing the groom’s feet) was a unique experience for the bride’s parents (05/25/2008).
from this sentiment that the two sets of grandchildren share what they also share is similar viewing of TV and film. While the young second generation may not find the not so slickly produced TV serials palatable but they do enjoy watching Hindi films.

A young graduate I met, and who is of mixed parentage, was self-conscious in her affirmation of the Indian half in her. She affirms her Indian identity so many ways – learning to cook Indian food, wearing an occasional salwar kameez, taking Hindi lessons, but most of all she is an avid follower of Hindi film, she is up to date on everything that happens in Bollywood. The self conscious affirmation of Indian roots has been particularly noticed during the years at college (Maira,2002; Kurien,2007) Teenagers on the other hand very often disdainful of the Indian culture that their parents are trying to push down their throats, but having acquired an acceptance among the young Indian in US Bollywood movies are consumed with gusto. A lot of overseas Indians, including people whose families left India decades ago, are much more captivated by these Indian-made films than by those from Hollywood, Something resonates, a cultural meta-discourse of behaviour and relationship patterns connects them to these films. Some of the people I have met actually learned what little Hindi they know from watching these films. The Indian film industry has become more sensitive to the needs of the Indian diaspora because they have become a major part of their audience. Whatever be the reasons for consumption of Indian movies or TV what is of importance is the spread of the media, electronic and print which keeps the circulation of culture that is avidly consumed.
6.5.1 Proliferation and Spread of Media in the Globalised World

Surfing channels in his suburban apartment on a Sunday afternoon, Shashi Kant could not help but marvel at the burgeoning options for news and entertainment from South Asia. When he moved from Bangalore to the United States 20 years ago, a homesick Kant spent his days longing for familiar images. "There was just one channel that would screen news and entertainment from India, but the offering was brief," he reminisced. "If I overslept on a Sunday morning, I would miss it." Now, he says, the number of South Asian television programs available is "simply mind-boggling." While a lot of these programs come from India, an increasing number are being produced in the United States. Zee TV tops the list among non-Hispanic ethnic television channels in terms of paying subscribers in the United States. The channel started its U.S. operations in July 1998. A year later, it launched Zee Gold, a 24/7 South Asian movies and music channel. The channel airs 44 movies every week, seven of them during the weekend, providing an "unadulterated glimpse of Bollywood."

An advertisement for a 'desi radio channel in Devon Avenue
South Asia World Inc. launched *South Asia World*, a 24-hour English-language news and infotainment channel. The channel has operational arrangements with Television Eighteen India Limited (TV18), a company founded by Raghav Bahl that also runs CNBC-TV18, a business news channel based in India. South Asia World offers subscribers a mix of live news from the Indian subcontinent and coverage of the South Asian community in the United States and Britain. This is not the only channel. There are others which are Indian-American owned channels like *American Desi* that aims to cater to the specific community needs of Indian American keeping them in touch with home but at the same time catering to their American contexts.

A number of Indian channels are eyeing the diaspora market. ETV channels ETV Bangla, Telugu and Gujarati are also set to air in the United States. The government-owned All India Radio and Doordarshan are also eyeing overseas Indians. K.S. Sarma, CEO of the Prasar Bharati Corporation, says his plan to "reach everyone" was born from a long-standing demand for Doordarshan and All India Radio programs from the Indian diaspora (source: http://www.twfindia.com).

The reasons for choosing to subscribe to ethnic media channels are variously given as: Cultural familiarity – whereby ethnic minority people could see their culture reflected on screen and in the press. Many older immigrants said that there is certain comfort level to watching news and other entertainment programmes in one's own language. And of course they was a link to home. An aspect of mainstream channels is that there is hardly an representation of Indians in them except for an occasional one who is scientist or a doctor, but often these representation of Indians in media are very stereotypical, swinging from the nerdy Indian to a fresh-off-the-boat character like Apu in Simpsons, either this or they are given secondary roles.
The larger cultural isolation from the American mainstream, which is both sought and desired by an earlier generation, has come to be the way Indian communities are organised. And in these communities, the Hindi movie watching and following lifestyle issues is glue that helps bring together disparate people. I was told by a young college graduate that she was not particularly found of Hindi movies or Indian movies for that matter but found that it was one of the topics of discussions among her peers and family. She said “people discussed dresses worn by Aishwarya Rai in Devdas and the dance moves of kajra re. I felt out of place in such discussions, sooner or later you end up watching these movies at family gathering or some Indian community gatherings. That is how I ended up watching Indian movies and channels and trying to catch up with trends, fashions etc that is Indian. There is no escaping them anyway, even if you don’t want to watch”, she added.

Some second generation youngsters admitted that not only are Hindi movies a conversation piece among their peers and the family gatherings but also it keeps them in tune with their cousins in India; “they are very surprised that we know so much about films and what is happening in India”. The viewing of Bollywood movies offers a choice to its audiences to partake in a cultural activity that includes signs and cues of Indianess, not readily available in mainstream America and Hollywood films. Bollywood films include audio and visual representations of the Indian subcontinent and its diasporas, and they act as a vehicle for initiating social communication amongst its audiences.

6.5.2 Bollywood: incorporating home and abroad

Hindi cinema does pervade settings as diverse as the UK, the US, Fiji, Guyana and several countries in the Middle East and Africa with long histories of contact with India. What is important to note of these flows is the
shift, beginning in the mid-1990s, in the mutually constitutive relationship between commercial Hindi cinema and Indian immigrant communities (particularly in the UK and the US). These audiences can no longer be treated as merely markets catalysing the ‘globalisation’ of the Hindi film industry or as communities seemingly starved of cultural resources, but rather, as an integral part of the cultural imaginary of Hindi cinema (Desai, 2004; Mishra, 2002).

The Bollywood films themselves are no more confined to the geography of home. The distinct world of the desh (home) and pardesh (abroad) and those who inhabit these geographies is no more. Movies in the Manoj-Kumar-hyper-nationalist-mode where the West is corrupt and home is pure is beginning to be rewritten. Though films like DDLJ (Dilwale Dulhaniya le Jayenge) and Pardes continued with the stereotypes of the occident and the orient, though in a less strident way, there is however an attempt not to other the diasporic Indian as being enamoured by the West. Aswin Punathambekar argues that the film Khabi Khushi Khabi Ghum (K3G)\(^{88}\), which is about a transnational-yet-Indian-at heart family ruled by a patriarch (played by Amitabh Bachchan), the film revolves around the pet themes of family, marriage, tradition and nation. Punathambekar writes:

> In exploring and cautiously legitimising the cultural space of Indian life in the diaspora, K3G renders the diaspora’s version of Indianness less transgressive and/or impure (as in a long line of movies from Purab Aur Paschim to Pardes) and more of an acceptable variant of

\(^{88}\) K3G is the story of an Indian family headed by a business tycoon Yashovardhan Raichand (Amitabh Bachchan) and his wife Nandini (Jaya Bachchan) who have two sons, Rahul (Shahrukh Khan, who is adopted) and Rohan (Hrithik Roshan). Rahul falls in love with Anjali (Kajol), a girl from Chandni Chowk, a lower-class neighbourhood in Delhi. Amitabh disowns Shahrukh, and Shahrukh leaves for London accompanied by Kajol and her younger sister Poo (played by Kareena Kapoor). On learning about these incidents, Hrithik sets out to London, promising to reunite the family.
Indianness. In positioning and drawing the diaspora into the fold of a ‘great Indian family’, *K3G* articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the diaspora to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India’s tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India’s navigation of this space. The importance of this process of mediation by Hindi cinema becomes especially clear, I suggest, when seen in relation to the Indian state’s recent attempts (for example, *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* [Non-resident Indian Day]) to forge symbolic and material ties with the expatriate community.

The poster-perfect transnational but united family

The poster for the film *K3G*, clearly shows the idealised and well choreographed photograph of the family. Earlier we talked about the spectacularisation of familiness through visual culture such as family photo
albums. This film certainly lends off visual clues to the notion of Indian family. Films like this may portray the everyday struggles and anxieties of diasporic Indians, their struggle to straddle the world of material achievements and preserving Indian values and traditions. Hindi film consumption in the diaspora speaks to first generation Indians desperately trying to sustain a value system and inculcate the same in their children that sets them apart from mainstream society in countries like the US and the UK. ‘These differences’, Mishra writes, ‘are generally about tradition, continuity, family, and often, the importance given to arranged marriages’ (2002: 236-7).

Many families I interviewed, nearly all of them, were anxious about the influence of ‘outside world on the growing children’. Some actually said that “with watching Hindi movies they might inculcate some good values….like respect for elders, for traditions…”

Almost all the families I interviewed, it was the mothers who watched Hindi films with their children, translating for them and explaining, as one woman said, ‘all the Indian customs and traditions’. As Prashad writes, ‘the woman is here responsible, in large measure, for preventing the acculturation of the children. A heavy burden in a society far more complex than this simple and sexist separation of domains is allowed to bear’ (Prashad, 2000: 105). The women’s question becomes particularly pronounced in relation to raising daughters in the diaspora. English-language films and music, soaps and sitcoms on television and stereotypical assessments of modes of socialisation (dating, for instance) and other sociocultural phenomena (divorce rates, single-parent households, and so on) are all marshalled as evidence of the debauched West and situated in sharp contrast to the traditional and morally superior values of ‘Indianness’ in countless Hindi movies and by several families interviewed during the course of this study. The families I
interviewed were willing to negotiate some common ground with their daughters without necessarily ‘reverting to petrified templates of dating and sexual norms in India’ (Maira, 2002: 159).

Ideals and norms becomes even more pronounced with questions concerning marriage and the imminent threat of interracial marriage. Speaking of DDLJ, Uberoi writes, Indianness is defined with ‘reference to specificities of family life, the institutions of courtship and marriage in particular . . . whether at home or abroad, it is the Indian family system that is recognized as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian’ (1999: 163-4; emphasis in original).

As we already discussed, in our chapter, there is discernible shift in the genre of movies that came out of Bollywood in the 90s. The one movie which was a big box office hit of the 90s Hum Aap Ke Hai Kaun (HARK) which revolved around family and the many rituals that they engaged in, set a trend. This movies is a move away from the blood and gory of 1970s or earlier ones that engaged with poverty and the dreams and aspirations of the migrant and one from the hinterland. Movies like - HAHK-were considered ‘family movies’; sanitised and happy that all members of family can watch the story of a perfect family.

For the first generation the Indian films provide an emotional resonance that is born of nostalgia, the anxieties of raising their children as Indians. But for a lot of second-generation Indian Americans, they films particularly Bollywood that has come to be associated with India “watching Indian movies is something you do if you are an Indian, it is like eating Indian food” is what a college going suburbanite told me. It seems that for many second generation Indians it is like staple ingredient to being Indian, something that set them apart from other immigrants. Besides as another second-generation young
lady told me “the films are so much more slicker, the dances are so much cooler, and the music is much more interesting than the older movies”. It also helps that the urban youth has taken this cultural item and created their beat. Maira talks about this in her book *Desis in the House*, where second generation Indian youth is trying to create a sense of what it means to be Indian but in their own terms. The mix it in ways that takes slices of their own lived experiences and influences surrounding them. Maira uses the term remix both literally (literally in the sense that the music itself is remixed with samples from hip-hop, reggae and of course, the ubiquitous bangra, which has come to represent the Indian beat) and, metaphorically, She says;

I like the term “remix youth culture” because it captures that mixing on many levels. For me the term “remix” just works on many levels. I try to argue in the book that for second generation youth, authenticity gets defined by their parents, by the media, and by the institutions they participate in. Authenticity tends to be based on very particular elements of Indian culture that get transplanted to the US... and those elements are not necessarily representative of cultures within India, that the second generation feels this need to live up to this authentic vision that their parents constantly hold up to them. But then when they go to India or when they meet other kinds of first generation Indians who are very different from their parents, they come to realize that Indian culture is actually much more complicated and heterogeneous than their parents sometimes let on...I think the book is trying to complicate that idea by pointing out that it’s not really the second generation *per se* that’s confused, but it is this notion of authenticity that is very limiting and that actually creates this tension in the second generation, who are trying to produce their own notions of authenticity.
It is precisely this remixes and hybridity that one notices in the way the ritual performances are observed among the Indian Americans. In this the media and market conglomerations have mediated, cluing in the way only business instincts do that the new sites of celebration and engagement of tradition, of which rituals are an important element, are the family oriented celebrations. As for the agents involved in this celebratory and traditional enactments, it is not so much traditions that is often associated with authenticity that is of importance as finding signs, clues and markers that unite and differentiate them from one another.

In the next chapter, I will weave the various implications of my ethnographic engagement into an analysis that has a bearing on the fundamental issues that this thesis revolves around.