Chapter 7
Conclusions

As mentioned at the very outset, this doctoral research set out to explore the transnational social fields of immigrants and those who stayed back. The two cities that were chosen for the field study were Delhi and Chicago. The two cities can be seen as nodes in a wired interconnected world, and cities that I was familiar with, having lived in both. The focus of the study was on the life-worlds of middle-class Indians, their consumptions patterns and habits around life-cycle rituals. As we gathered from our review of literature, there are ample indications that the Indian immigrants have ongoing ties with their home country. The crisscrossing worlds of home and abroad have been brought out tentatively, in the sense that certain aspects of transnational connections have been explored, such as marriage (Palriwal and Uberoi, 2005, remittances and economic development initiatives in home country (Thandi, 2006, Helwig, 1983) There are studies which point to the imaginative engagement of home and abroad in the field of visual representation, especially the Bollywood movies (Uberoi, 1998; Moorti, 2003; Punathambekar, 2003). However, there are no comprehensive studies which look at the social fields of those who migrate and those who stay back. There is a taken for granted view that the lives of migrants and those who stay back intersect. In what way they intersect has not been adequately explored. It is for this reason our study is exploratory in nature, we are not taking the social fields for granted, but gathering from the field the intimate way home and abroad intersect and engage both the migrant and the ones who stay back.
The main objective of our ethnographic exploration was to uncover ways in which identities are expressed, through acts of consumption and observances of rituals in transnational context. This was done through a study of consumption that surrounds life-cycle rituals. For consumption with its multivalent markers and significances do indicate the various social distinctions of caste, ethnicity, class, and nation and so on. Rituals are sites that are known to be consumptive in its orientation and having the sanctions of tradition, therefore it is a site that is amenable for readings on issues of identity. So while our ethnographic exploration is around the site of ritual observances and performances, the study is not about rituals per se, but an analysis of the consumption patterns and behaviour that will point to the various identity expressions in transnational contexts and space. The study then drew inferences from the site of ritual observances, chiefly on the issue of identity, and what these identity expressions reveal in terms of larger societal structures and processes. What is also of interest is whether the coming together of the migrant and their kin, into a single shared space, would amount to a community formation.

As we mentioned earlier, we can not take for granted that the lives of people who migrated and those who stayed back intersect in ways unknown before in a global interconnected world. In what way do home and abroad come together, to make possible a single social field that cuts across borders, is one of our central question. Therefore, we seek to answer the question and point to the essential interconnections and intersections in the life-worlds of the migrants and their home country. After examining the nature of the transnational space of the Indian middle-class we place the dynamics of family, rituals, community and identity in this transnational context. It is well worth to recapture the main points of our discussion on transnational space and then capture the ways home and abroad intersect.
7.1 Transnational Social Space

An overriding aspect of globalisation that is agreed upon in general, by almost all who have been studying the process, is that the world is ever more interconnected than before. As we have mentioned before that these interconnections can be seen in flows of people, capital, goods, ideas and images that is unprecedented. These flows have made it possible for persistent interactions and exchanges across distances and time. Lash and Urry (1987), suggest that late 20th century society is characterised by flows of capital, labour, commodities, information and images. In a similar vein, Appadurai (1990, 1996) terms these multi-dimensional interconnections as: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. These interactions are connecting people across borders challenging notions of interaction within neighbourhood or within a ‘community’.

These interconnections and flows have been referred to as transnational connections. The word transnationalism, as we mentioned earlier, is said to capture the various cross-border activities. There are many activities which are subsumed under the term transnationalism. As pointed out rightly by Faist, there are many terms such as transnationalism, transnational communities, transnational social space and field, transnational circuits, which are sometimes used simultaneously and interchangeably, which add to the confusion. He proposes that one must separate the categories. We have examined (in section 2.4), the strands within the larger processes of transnatioanlism and for the purpose of our study chose to focus on the transnational social fields. We followed Peggy Levitt and Glick Schiller’s
elaboration of the concept for our ethnographic exploration. We recapitulate what they had to say on transnational social fields:

we define social fields as a set of multiple interlocking networks of relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed...the concept of social field is powerful tool for conceptualizing the potential array of social relations linking those who move and those who stay behind. It takes us beyond the direct experience of migration in to domain of interactions where individuals who do not move themselves maintain social relations across borders through various forms of communication...By conceptualising transnational fields as transcending the boundaries of nation state, we also note that individuals within these fields are through their everyday activities and relationships, influenced by multiple set of laws and institutions. Their daily rhythm and activities respond not only to more than one state simultaneously but also to social institutions, such as religious groups, that exist within many states and across their borders (Levit and Glick Schiller, 2004:608).

The endeavour in exploring transnational space, besides the primary focus of trying to understand the issue of identity among Indians, was to understand how two geographic places – Delhi and Chicago – separated by borders and distance, effectively become one place. We were trying to capture the everyday lives of people to see how the intersecting worlds influence each other. While there is a general acknowledgement in diaspora scholarship on Indians that there are transnational connections and networks, they have not covered the nodes that are connected, as in two locales. The studies, as we pointed (review of literature) have no comprehensive multisided ethnographies of Indians at home and abroad. Usually the accounts of home and abroad connection have captured the organisational, institutional,
transnational connections at macro levels and very few have studies what Alejandro Portes calls globalisation 'from below' or what can be considered as transnational spaces at micro level.

As our accounts, discussions and analysis indicate, in chapter four and chapter five, the lives of the Indians who live in Delhi, indeed, are intersecting with social fields of their kith and kin abroad. And that the networks and flows between Delhi and Chicago are on going and denser than what it was for the earlier immigrants. Our focus, no doubt is on the everyday lives of the migrants and their kin back home, but the everyday lives of people are mediated by the larger societal processes. These intersecting spaces can be seen in the following ways.

7.1.1 Transnational Business and Market

We mentioned earlier on, in our second chapter, that the deterritorialisation has many ramifications, one of which is the economic activity. Following the line of argument offered by the transformationalist (section 2.2.1 ) that see globalisation as the driving force behind social, cultural, political, ecological and economic changes that are reshaping the societies the world over, we see that the economic activity is not confined to any one area/place. In this globalising economy, systems of transnational production, exchange and finance implicate the lives and the fortunes of communities and households on different continents. We have seen how the opening up of the Indian economy and the entry of transnational corporations and the setting up of their offshore activities, in satellite towns of Gurgaon for instance, have fueled consumerist oriented lifestyles among the mobile middle class. It is not just the American based or corporations from the West who look to India for its marketing and business potential. Indian capitalist ventures too are eyeing the
greener pastures of transnational economy. The tentative entry of Indian economy in to the transnational world is not just confined to big businesses.

In the contexts of the Indian diaspora, it can be witnessed in the proliferation of small businesses that cater to the Indian diaspora all over the world. For instance we talked about wedding businesses (section 5.4) small outfits (small in relation to corporations, but big enough to have global operations) that now cater to diasporas across the world. The transnational social fields of the migrants and the kin back home also meet in the way ethnic foods market allow them to access packaged Indian food coming from abroad and produced locally. For example India Kitchen (a business venture of the big company Indian Tobacco Company – ITC) globalises itself to cater to Indians abroad as well as the domestic market; in the process of course the Indian cuisine itself becomes amenable for global consumption by non-Indians. Pilsbury (a big food corporation based in America) on the other hand ethnises its food market by catering to the Indian population with its packaged paranthas – Indian flat bread.

As we mentioned earlier in our chapter 5, ‘we seem to be living in an age that is ‘tradition hungry’ in the sense of ‘needing ideas to live by’. The ideas are akin to brands that are provided by corporate and business concerns’ (Grant 2000:15). For business houses culture and tradition are one more area that can be sold. The Times of India group for instance, as we recounted earlier, has caught on to this need for tradition and culture by offering online products that cater to the diaspora across the transnational space. Not only such business ventures but religious oriented institutions be it temples or religious and spiritual oriented outfits also figure in the transnational spaces, engaging with the lives of people abroad and at home. The temples, in America, as can be seen are instrumentally oriented in the way they run the religious
organisations and institutions (section 6.4.2). The proliferation of Hindu temples meant there is demand for religious specialist and other ritual requirements, which are imported from India. Priests are specially trained to the specific needs of the diasporic community. Some training institutions like the Hindu Heritage Prashishtan, Modipuram- a small town near Delhi, offer diploma course that also gives working knowledge of English, so they are able to traverse the transnational spaces.

In our two chapters – 5 and 6 – we have given many instances and expressions of how the transnational space of the Indian middle class in Chicago and Delhi is mediated by the transnational business and market. Not just the big corporations but the smaller business as well. These transnational business operations, whether they are in the area of religion, food, culture, telecommunication etc. link the lives of people across distance. Thus transnationalisation of religious outfits and organisations makes Brahmin priest acquire a transnational orientation. Also implicated in the transnational spaces are many other such agents; the traveling corporate professional who are willing to move from one global city to the other for high salaries and global lifestyles. And the lives of their family, aged parents for example are equally drawn in to the transnational space.

7.1.2 Telecommunications and Travel: Bridging the Distance

Besides business, the technologies of telecommunication and travel have brought home and abroad together. What makes the old diaspora different from the transnationally connected migrants is their engagement with home and a constant contact. Practically, every family that I interacted with in Chicago and its neighbourhood and in Delhi spoke of the increased

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89 We mentioned a report in BBC (online edition) of such training activities for priest, in our chapter 6, section 6.4.2).
communication with their families. We did mention that the pre-silicon boom situation was different within the families that I interacted with. The affordability of telephones has now brought the lives of people spread over a distance in to social field of everyday interactions. So, in the life-cycle of a family we noticed perceptible difference in the level of communication and contact between home and the host countries, altering the way families relate to each other. We have given instances of the everyday aspects of life, of events, celebrations etc. that are enacted out in the transnational space afforded by telecommunications. Instances of families in everyday conversation through technologies of communications abound in our field. Nearly all the families talked of increased communication with family members spread across geographical spaces.

In fact, telecommunication technologies, internet in particular, have become the very essence of transnational connections. The interconnections and networks afforded by telecommunications, according Castells (1996), is the very morphology of our times and basic unit of our society. The middle-class is certainly more wired than before, as they can afford these technologies. More people now are able to afford a personal computer, along with internet connectivity, right at home. The networks allow people to be part of circuit of shared flows of images, ideas, items of culture, capital and so on. Many transnational communities access the net for various community needs. Websites catering to transnational communities have chat rooms where users can carry out a discussion by posting messages. Discussions range on topics that include culture, literature, entertainment, politics, and current events in the countries of origin and settlement. The discussion could be about events in the home country or in the host country linking home and abroad in virtual space of discussion boards and chat sites. We mentioned earlier on how relations,
which are scattered and lost due to distance and time can be re-established, as it happened with one of our informants.

Additionally, actual movement of people is now on the increase and travels between home and abroad have become more frequent among family members. I have summarised from the many accounts from my interactions with various families that taking a trip to India for a wedding, a funeral, a graduation ceremony, and travel in India etc. are more frequent. Air travel at one time used to be a luxury that could only be afforded by the upper class and the migrant heading to the greener pastures of the West. But now it is quite common to find people traveling from Delhi to visit their siblings or relatives in Chicago or New York for a summer vacation; as it is common to have family reunions in holiday retreats in Europe. Also, one often finds aged parents traveling back and forth between home and to their children in the US. Among the families I interacted with, I found that the parents typically in their late 60 or 70s had Green Cards which allow them to stay for extended periods. And some of them live six months in the US and the rest in India. The grandchildren in turn now have grandparents to accompany them to a trip to India, during vacation time. The circulating elders and children with intersecting life worlds are learning and unlearning experiences for both. The circulating elders and children then are agents of reproduction of culture. For the children it is an introduction to the mother tongue and Indian culture. For the elders it is learning experience of ways of the West and unlearning of some of the notions one has of the 'occident'. These movements of people are stimulated by larger process of globalisation.

Saskia Sassen indicates that economic links ranging from off-shoring of production, foreign investment into export-oriented agriculture, and the power of multinationals in the consumer markets of developing states has often
resulted in the mass movement of people (1996: 77). Crossing the boundaries, in both literal and metaphorical sense through actual travel and through networks of connections, certainly makes for shared spaces and intersecting social fields between migrants and the ones who stay back.

7.2.3 Transnational Global Media

Information and telecommunication technologies with ‘their wired networks’ makes it possible for images, ideas etc., to be transported and transferred over the globe. Along with it are flows such as images of war, earthquakes, fashion, soap operas, commercials... among a host of others which enter the minds of people, simultaneously, across the globe.

In the pre-liberalisation world of middle-class India, exposure to all things ‘foreign’, meaning mainly the West, was limited. One waited for the brother or a relative to make their visit to India to get a pair of jeans, a bottle of perfume or some electronic goods. The exposure to the West was limited in other consumptive levels. The images coming from the west were regulated (TV viewership was regulated as the only TV channels were state owned) and limited. There was no internet, no simultaneous release of movies, soaps and news channels that stream events happening elsewhere in real time. Things have changed with cable TV and the world streaming in to one’s living room. It is generally believed that there is more of the West, especially Hollywood and American TV shows that flow to the rest of the world. The cultural flows through electronic media were mainly from the North to the South. Though that is largely true even now, because of movements of people from South to North the ethnic media has moved to areas where there are ethnic
populations\textsuperscript{90}. In chapter six, section 6.5.1 we have gone in to details as to how there is proliferation of electronic media that caters to the Indian diaspora in US and Chicago.

The ethnic media and the Bollywood together now include the Indian diaspora in its ambit and engage with them in a way that resonates with their everyday lives. Also, one could be introduced to aspects of the world. These images of the 'other', however, are often imaginatively manipulated, stylised and rehashed. For instance the Bollywood movies have introduced the Indian audiences -- or for that matter audiences anywhere -- to a version of hip-hop that is unhinged and has no reference to the working-class context of the African American people. Similarly, as we argued elsewhere, certain cultural items acquire consumptive coolness via Bollywood that get refigured and foregrounded like bhangra. As we mentioned in both our chapters, Bollywood has now spurned the social imagination to the extent that ritual performances are bollywoodised. The space that Bollywood has come to occupy has been sort of a glue that seem to connect not only disparate spaces but variations and differences such as ethnic, religious, language. In that sense Bollywood has come to acquire an integral association with India and indianness. These global flows between home and abroad help create simultaneous viewing and shared space. Young people in Chicago and in Delhi now have common space of consumption – TV shows like Friends or the latest Bollywood film like Om Shanti Om, are common grounds for conversation. And for the older generation there is seamlessness, even in dislocation, when they can continue to watch a regional TV show whether they are in Chicago, Delhi or Chennai.

\textsuperscript{90} The term ethnic populations seem to be used do denote communities from the South. Even though there were massive movement of people of especially of Anglo-Saxon origin in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century to ‘new world’ they are rarely considered as an ‘ethnic community’.
The above interconnections are a way of summarising the details and thick descriptions of the interconnections we talked about throughout the chapter 5 and 6. Having established the transnational setting and context for our actors, the sections to follow seek to analyse and examine some of the chief concerns and themes, namely the family, the performances of ritual and their significance in the transnational contexts, the articulation of identity around them and lastly the notion of community.

Before we undertake an analysis of our main themes and issues, we need to spell out a caveat to the analysis of family, ritual and notions of identity or community and that is that these notions are inscribed in a variegated and nuanced social cleavages that are part of the Indian society. A discussion on family, for instance, would necessarily have to take in to consideration the trajectories of the family in the context of social hierarchies of caste, gender, ethnicity, region and religion. This also applies to the notional category of middle class, after all 'a middle class family' from the erstwhile Madras Presidency would be different from a Dalit middle class whose entry to mobility aspirations are, perhaps, only two generations old. The aspirations and references for these would reflect differently. We tried to keep in mind the cleavages and hierarchies that are subsumed in the category of middle class family. There are so many variations within that it is impossible to come to an general patterns except to make some broad generalisations on region, caste and hierarchies of gender.

91 We highlighted the historical trajectories of caste in our fourth chapter, section, 4.3.
7.2 The Transnational Family

The notion of family often evokes a very strong image of close intimate face to face contact. In transnational context where families are separated by real distance there is often a common tendency to think that the closeness and extended nature of families is under stress, if not disintegrating.

During the 50s and 60s in India, the sociologist and the anthropologist were heavily engaged in the inference that the joint family in India was disintegrating. Extrapolating from the articles published\(^{92}\) in *Sociological Bulletin*, Tulsi Patel argues that all the writings in that period were suggesting that the Indian joint family was going the Western way. The Western family was said to transform “in to conjugal one as the society evolved from agricultural to industrial” (Patel, 2005:38) Urbanisation was seen as *one of the factors* that resulted in migration and subsequent breakdown of the traditional ‘Hindu joint family’ (Kapadia, 2005). According to Patel this notion is not only popular in sociology but overflowed in journalistic writing thus entering the public consciousness (ibid). One of the NRI families that I interacted with was echoing this very sentiment when he said that “generally people think that since we moved out of India we don’t have family connections or that we are not involved with our families back home, but that is wrong. We are very much involved. And Indians by nature are very family oriented.” The Indian diaspora indeed has tried to create the ‘familyhood’ through contacts, both virtual and real.

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\(^{92}\) The prevalence of linked migrant to his relatives in the village added a caveat to the general conclusion that the Indian family was disintegrating. Of linkage was seen as a kind of functional jointness, even if there was no actual dwelling and habitation of extended kin. Desai’s (1956) distinction between structural nuclear and functionally joint has also been followed by Kapadia, (1959, also 2005) in analysing the changing family structure.
It was clear from my observations, from the two year fieldwork and prior engagement with a transnational situation, that the migrant and the kin back home are very much in touch. My account of family situations in Chicago and Delhi does show that more than ever the family seems to have expanded in ambit in that they now extend beyond borders. Earlier diasporic Indians could not make frequent travels or engage with home due to slower, costlier communication and transport networks. That situation does not exist anymore, telecommunication technologies have greatly aided in getting families to interact much more, both in real and virtual terms.

What marks the transnational families from earlier formations of family is not so much structural or functional arrangements that extend the families but the interactions offered by telecommunication facilities, extending the ambit of families beyond tightly conceived typologies. Instead of engaging in whether the extended families so formed by interactions in transnational settings are structurally oriented, or functionally oriented one, we want to point out that interactions both virtual ad real have expanded the scope of the transnational families.

The families now work as networks, the more wired, the greater the flow of information and communication. As we pointed in our chapters 4 and 5, many of our informants have pointed out how they are able to share everyday concerns through networks they have among the families. Families are rediscovered and restructured through telecommunication technologies. Thus a group of cousins interact over internet, through social network groups, chats or through telephones and are able to connect in a way that was possible earlier only through face to face communication. And these connections among family members are not necessarily out of compulsions of familial obligations. An aunt, father's brother might be more important in terms of
kinship duties and obligations but if she is not part of that transnational space of networks she probably does not figure prominently in the life of the individual.

_The notion of family and family as an institution is being reaffirmed._ Family occasions, such as ritual observances for instance, do reveal the participation of family in larger and denser ways than it was possible with immigrants before. Media and market mediations also aid in the family becoming a site for celebratory aspects and a focus of traditions. The circulation of media images and ideas and consumption of similar things is not only a mode of shared space but also an avenue for the incorporation of the Indian community as a segment considered for marketing purposes. Similarly the extension of internet allows people to procure and consume objects, images, concepts, actual transactions and services. This extension of consumption into a single space certainly has expanded the reach and connectivity of families across space. Though the contexts are different the family indeed is an institution that has come to be renewed and reaffirmed with force. The family not only serves as an agency of reproduction of tradition but is valorised as a part of the traditional social organisation and idealised social unit.

For the migrants situated in America, the ideal of Indian family becomes an identity marker, as well as a source of sustenance for their largely insular situation. In the context of American value for individuality and post modern orientation towards alternatives has made Indian families cling to their families as a way of affirming their culture and as resistance to possibilities of assimilation.

As for their kith and kin in Delhi, extending the family connections to places outside home is source of social capital and celebration of the cosmopolitan
and global extension of the family. The family has come to be a source of materiality and traditions. Life-cycle rituals observances indicate a certain rootedness and search for traditionality. This, however, is imbued with a subtext of constant materiality which indicates a social position in society.

The family thus is continuing as a social organisation around which notions of tradition, culture and consumption are located and articulated, especially in the global context of fractured identities, migration and dislocated cultural contexts. The family not only serves as an agency of reproduction of tradition but is valorised as a part of the traditional social organisation and idealised social unit. This is seen especially in the context of postmodern articulations which have the possibility of upsetting built in hierarchies of gender, sexuality etc that are part of the structure of family. The family then has to be articulated and affirmed in a play of itself: a spectacle and performance of familiness. The clues of these can be seen in the new set of films coming out of Bollywood. The social organisation of family is not separate from the other social forces and processes that bring in new ways of organisation. (Networking across space – virtual and real, long distance extended families etc.).

The family is also a site where the ‘traditions’ that indicate ‘Indianess’ are celebrated and observed. It is found that it is the women who are the chief agents of socialisation of their family in to Indian culture and tradition. Here the family not only includes the young children who have to be familiarised and inculcated with Indian values but also the husband who has been lost to the professional world of his host country. Many early immigrants went as single men and eventually came to India to get married. The marriage signaled a metaphorical coming back home; a man who is not lost to the West despite his brief period of singledom.
The women as agents of reproduction of Indianess and as cultural bearers are especially noticeable among the first generation Indian women migrants, many who have taken homemaking as the chief concern, even if they are not fully engaged as homemakers. As for the second generation, the contexts are different, many are professionals who have grown up in America and as such have imbibed ideas values which place a great deal of worth on individual achievements. Hence, they tend to straddle both home and profession. Also noticeable among the second generation Indian Americans is a self conscious desire to inculcate Indian traditions and ways; it could be in religion, food, dress, more involved participation with things at home etc. To that extent men too seem to take equal interest in such things that bring them closer to home, especially in comparison to the men from earlier generation, who left it to women to take care of matters relating to culture. Part of the reason for the cultural transmission to be taking place is of course the highly genderised hierarchies with families but also because the earlier generation were not self-conscious imbibers of traditions, people did follow traditions because that was what they grow up with or that is what was practiced by elders. On the other hand self conscious inculcation and reproduction of traditional practices produces genderised practices which are built in to the ritual practices for example. Ritual practices in general as well as the life-cycle rituals are known to be hierarchical and patriarchal in nature.

Writing about Hindu Samskaras, Holmes and Bowker (1988:84) write that “through samskaras a person become familiar with the social status of different actors, his or her own place in the community and, the regulation of gender roles”. Thus, unless one is to throw the baby with the bath water to remove elements or not to observe rituals which are biased is not possible, as they are an integral part of traditional observances to mark different stages in
an individual's life. And even the self-conscious seekers of tradition, who may be critical of the content can not do without the deeply hierarchical rituals, as these are, at the end of it, indicative of one's cultural roots.

7.3 Rituals and Traditions in Transnational Setting

When we talk of rituals in transnational settings, we are obviously comparing the rituals practices to what they were when the global flows between home and abroad were less frequent. Our reference point to this changing context is the families that I have interacted with. Our investigation is restricted to family's own lifecycle and the changing contexts within them. Thus, we are not positing changes in rituals against any ideal type or any textual contexts. In any case it is difficult to arrive at an ideal type of the rituals. Hindu traditions in general have been syncretic in nature and have not lent themselves to any classificatory possibilities.

Scholars who have looked at Hindu religion have generally concluded that Hinduism is a way of life, more than a theistic religious order (Hopkins, 1971; Embree, 1972). It is an ancient tradition that contains varying sects, scriptures, languages and practices: These conglomerations of traditions have also seen several transformations. Robert Redfield and Mckim Marriott in their study of India and Indian culture have variously argued that peasant society or folk culture and larger civilisational culture signified by priests, theologians and literary men have constantly interacted and as such or not mutually exclusive: two currents of thought that are distinguishable but ever flowing in to each other. There has always been a syncretism that was the

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93 The terms folk and civilisational or 'little' or 'great tradition' themselves are problematique, as they themselves are not watertight categories in reality. A lot of folk elements have civilisational aspects that are residual, perhaps, and similar is the case with civilisational aspects of Hindu culture which has borrowed from folk elements. The fluidity is what has characterised hinduistic traditions and continues to do so.
hallmark of hinduistic traditions. Rituals too were transformed in this general rubric of ever flowing exchanges within hinduistic traditions.

An overriding conclusion we can draw from our field investigation is that there is an increase in the observances of life-cycle rituals within the family life-cycle. There is not only an increase in the number of rituals being performed and observed but also the consumption that surrounds, it has reached extravagant proportions. The items, services and specialist that are required for rituals have been made available through the mediation of global flows of business, market, people and images. The combination of these flows have certainly aided in compelling, to put in the words of Appadurai (1996), the ‘social imaginary’. And this can be seen in the emotive, material and creative investment in the way rituals are performed. Besides, the pre-liberalised attitudes of secular understated traditional orientation of the early immigrants have been replaced with a consumptive, materialist display of tradition and culture.

Throughout our fieldwork investigation we did notice generational differences in the performances of rituals. The early migrants (the pre 90s immigrants) and their counterparts in India – siblings, uncles and aunts were self conscious modernists, who were informed by the colonial trajectory of being a part of the middle class. This class was part of the Nehruvian and Gandhian inspired era, that was self-conscious of their own place in the modern nation. The idea of ‘Indian’ nation that was forward and progressive was intertwined with orientalist notions of Indian civilisational aspects (Chatterjee, 1992 and Sanghari 2001). Display of money was not one of the main cultural capital of these class. They distinguished themselves by their modern English education and certain genteel version of traditions that were fairly austere in comparison to the more recent celebratory rituals. Earlier, the rituals were performed in
rote manner, as something that has to be practiced, without really trying to understand the meanings or significance of the rituals. As against this the post 90s rituals reveal a great deal of consumption. A need to celebrate and affirm traditions seems to motivate the families, especially one residing in US to indulge in extravagant show of their rootdness. Not to be undone, the relatives indulge in competitive celebrations.

*The nature of audience has changed for the transnationally located families.* It is not just the families that are typically the audiences and participants, but they include (especially for weddings) colleagues, and people from outside one’s own ethnicity and religion and nation. This has implications for the performances of rituals. What has to be showcased is greatly dependent on who the audiences are. As we explained in our earlier chapters, 5 and 6, when it comes to showing a Western audience the ‘Indian customs’ there is an element of the orientalised subjectivities that get expressed. Additionally, the valorisation of ‘brand India’ has contributed in to making some things acquire a cool quotient. Such items of culture are now affirmed by the ones engaging in the rituals and recognised by the non Indian audience, for example the Bollywood dance style, bhangra, or henna.

In a bounded community, hierarchies were set and everyone’s place in society designated by one’s customs and manners. For instance, at one time Dalits could not carry an umbrella or wear shoes, things might have changed a bit, but even now they still seem to be clashes between the higher castes and ones below them for seemingly stepping out of their ascribed social position, which is revealed in their life-styles, among other things. But in cities, especially in transnational settings the markers of upwardly mobile status are unhinged from their moorings. So it is possible that anyone with the social capital afforded by migration can acquire the requisite culture which allows them to
pronounce authenticity and genteelness; Vedic discourses, participatory liturgical nature of prayers at temples, temple construction (both abroad and at home), sponsoring of high-art cultural events such as recitals (classical music, and dance) Vedic readings etc, are examples of acquisition of high Indian culture.

On the other hand, there is revival of little traditions, which have almost been side stepped over time or haven’t been noticed in public consumptive spaces. Lately there is valorisation among ethnicities and castes to follow customs and traditions that are indicative of their particular traditions. I found that ceremonies celebrating the coming-of-age for young girls being observed among certain immigrants, little known local traditions or ceremonies that are not part of the main celebrations are being rediscovered or removed from their original cultural or regional moorings, for example hiding the groom’s shoes by the bride’s family adds a fun element to the wedding rituals and has been adopted by many families across regions and ethnicities.

Besides the little traditions which seem to be revived, there is the free borrowing of traditions and practices from other regions and ethnicities to be incorporated along with one’s own. The wedding planners offer a platter of various ceremonies and themes that is for choosing. Not so surprisingly therefore, it is not just the Punjabi weddings which feature dhol or just north Indian weddings which have sangeet and mehendi ceremony. In fact, certain features of wedding such as Bollywood dances, DJs and MCs have become a staple of many Indian weddings, irrespective of regional differences. The prototype of what an Indian wedding constitutes seemed to be offered by a whole set of films that have now found a global appeal. The Indian wedding is now a case in point of deterretoriality, where the contexts and mornings of a tradition are secondary, if not totally insignificant, to the celebratory and
spectacle possibility it offers. So you could be from anywhere in the world but you could chose to have an “Indian wedding.”

The idea of what constitutes Indian for the migrant is free flow of bits and pieces from all genres and traditions, that may include regional, ethnic, high, and folk traditions. As was mentioned, the issue is not one of authenticity anymore as much as the audiences and participants who are part of this performance and spectacle that is the Indian tradition.

The idea of Indianess and consequently the category of Indian, in the way it is expressed, is now open for endless variations and permutation combinations like the Indian wedding. While there are many variations within rituals, variations that are representative of differences within India, there is also a combination that yields a semblance of new traditions that are being consumed across spaces and ethnicities. Does this similarity of consumption around rituals mean there is pan-Indianisation of the rituals?

As we mentioned earlier there has always been a syncretic fluid elements to many cultural traditions in India. The recent global flows have added to this fluidity of rituals. In the contexts of global flows between home and abroad, it is possible that some influences or practices get more prominence than others. As we mentioned, for instance, mehendi and sangeet are now popular in south Indian weddings too. We did pose the question whether there is pan-indianisation of life-cycle rituals earlier and it seems there some element of that. But few caveats have to be spelt out at this stage and these are that for a conclusive statement to be made that there is pan-indianisation 1) we have to have an expansive survey oriented approach to undertake a study that will indicate the spread of practice or tradition to different regions (India as geographical entity), and ethnicities of India and 2) an inventory of practices
that can be analysed in terms of pan-indianisation. I have not undertaken such a study with a focus of trying to identify practices that may be lending themselves to pan-indianisation. We do, however, offer a hint of what seems to be happening, based on field observation and that is: there seems to be discernible element of pan-indianisation of life-cycle rituals. Certain aspects of rituals are now becoming common across traditions.

Our observations are mostly drawn from the wedding rituals, where it is noticed that traditions such as mehendi ceremony has now become part of repertoire of many weddings. Many South Indian weddings, which traditionally did not have the mehendi ceremony have adopted it, minus the ceremonial practices associated with it, more for its celebratory value. Similarly the ladies sangeet, now increasingly known as sangeet, is another aspect that is becoming a staple of wedding rituals. The sangeet has lost much of its original connotations and is no more exclusive to women and it is no more representative of folk culture where women sang and danced to folk songs but has come to be a dance and song event. There are other ceremonies and practices which are being incorporated in to the wedding celebration such as stealing the groom’s shoes, which have been popularised by Bollywood films such as *Hum Aap ke Hai Kaun* that are popular with wedding repertoire. Dhol playing is an element that is typical of Punjabi wedding but in many weddings of North India, among the Indians in US it has come to signify a live musical element. Besides these, weddings in US have introduced DJs, which now have crept in to Indian weddings, especially north Indian weddings. These loose combination of various elements – DJs and MCs and related entertainment events, sangeet, mehendi, cocktail parties, cosmopolitan eating stations, a smattering of folk traditions, a combination of regional elements (if the groom and bride are from different regions of India, especially) is beginning to be the new model of wedding ceremonies. This
combination in *large part* is being observed across regions and ethnicities, especially among the Indian immigrants in US, which is what makes us hazard an opinion that there is a hint of pan-indianisation as far as certain rituals or considered.

Temples in the US have started to offer services for the performances of life-cycle rituals which have greatly streamlined the structure of rituals. Though the temples tended to follow the regional observances, divided mainly in terms South Indian and North Indian, they do follow a set patterns largely based on the brahmanical notions of samskaras. The fact that there is the convenience of a ritual template offered by temples makes it easier for people to observe many lifecycle rituals besides the more popular ones. This following of rituals which also involves a great deal of consumption makes for a contagion effect where the relatives and audiences for whom there is show of wealth find it as a reference for either a sense of deprivation or way to outdo the other, thereby making the ritual observances as sites of struggle for social position. In this contestation the important thing is to be able to communicate a social position, the reference points therefore have to be communicable; a language which is understood by all. Thus, it makes no sense to have too much variation, which then would get subsumed under a notion of difference and not a shared space of contestation. With increasing number of inter-caste marriages or inter-ethnic marriages, especially in a transnational space, the participants in rituals feel a need for common ground to tread (for instance it was noticed that when the participants in a ritual are from two regional backgrounds or ethnicities they often restore to an Arya Samaj version of a ritual that can be understood by both and where there is not much ground for contestation of identities). Therefore there is a certain amount of homogenisations and combinations that are beginning to emerge in
ritual observances that are finding takers in different parts of India and among the diaspora, uniting them in single field of consumption of rituals.

An aspect which is of significance is the way market and media have made their presence felt in the way traditions and culture are accessed and performed. As we explained earlier too, and it has been the subtext of much of our ethnographic detail, the markets have launched themselves in to fulfilling the demand and hunger for traditions, and often creating it. We do not want to pose the chicken or egg question here of whether the markets fuel the desire for certain lifestyles, or whether they supply the existing demand, instead we believe that there is a dialectical relationship that is forged between the market and the actors. The postmodern quest for tradition, roots and identity is a result of shift in living patterns and working, especially among the diaspora. The nostalgia for the old world and search for meanings and order is now answered by the media and market mediated expressions.

Global advertising seeks to combine universal notions of personal freedom, good living, health, family and so on while catering to distinct cultural differences. The universal and the particular become the basis for many of the global market operations. The segmented market, as it is known, is the new way of ethnicising and highlighting the already existing differences by playing on the markers of difference. This form of segmentation involves defining markers in multiple countries based not on national boundaries but more often on lifestyle or value system. In catering to specific nationalities, the ethnicities the universal language of good living and consumption draws on imagery which evoke pride in one’s own traditions and culture. By appealing to sentiments of a glorious cultural, national and spiritual heritage, the markets, media define for India and its civilisational worth in the global context. In a situation, where there is no real contexts for playing out an idea of tradition and culture media mediated images have powerful reference points. This is
where Bollywood becomes significant as purveyor of things that are associated with India.

The spread of ethnic media and global media corporations, the reaching out and incorporation of the Indian diaspora by Bollywood film industry has created a space for the often simultaneous consumption of media mediated images and concepts. Has the simultaneity and spread of global and the local media created a shared space, enough to create a community that is forged by this shared space of consumption? This is one of the questions that we posed earlier and we attempt an answer to that question.

7.4 The Idea of Community and the Issue of Identity

The shared space of the imagined communities, as argued by Benedict Anderson, is mediated by print media aided by the capitalist market. Print capitalism along with capitalistic market made imagined communities of nations for Benedict Anderson. Could a similar sharedness be existing among the transnationally located groups? A sharedness that, as we narrated above, is mediated by the media and market. Do sharedness leads to a kind of feeling of community? Our proposition is that there is a shared space being noticed among the families of Delhi and Chicago, a space which is facilitated by their lifestyles and consumption, which is noticed in our study of life-cycle rituals.

Language has probably dominated our thinking about cultural boundaries, as it coincides with ethnic enclaves and notion of nation. Now, media technologies are increasingly able to deal with many other aspects – from news, to music to lifestyle, to just about everything. One wonders whether communities, especially de-spatialised communities, are increasingly moving beyond words, to a language which does not need specific contexts but is
everywhere, the world of TV, videos music, advertising – the world of images and consumption. Is it possible that a simultaneous consumption of things, ideas and images, which circulate everywhere crossing borders and times is creating a cognitive space. A space, which despite “differences and disjuncture” in a transnational flows, is creating spaces of convergence and sameness? In some sense creating a ‘language of consumption’— a language not only of utterances and signs producing a coherent communication in a structured way – the language in the traditional sense of the term, but also a communication of expressions – of signs, symbols, spectacle and performance through which meanings are conveyed.

Other social analysts have been hinting at the possibilities of such social spaces of sharedness. Apadurai, feels that the “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination” (1996:4). He elaborates further by adding that the imagination is no longer “a matter of specially endowed (charismatic) individuals, injecting the imagination where it does not belong. Ordinary people have begun to deploy their imagination in their everyday practices of their lives…. they move the glacial habitus in to quickened beat of improvisation for larger group of people…. Imagination is now part of the collective…. Part of what mass media makes possible because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism and pleasure …called a ‘community sentiment’, a group that begins to imagine and feel things together”(ibid:8). Something worth exploring in Appadurai’s argument is the notion of “shared sentiment” which emanates out of shared experiences – of images, events, reading, consuming – all those arenas of convergence.
The transnational Indian with her/his imaginative deployment of cultural artifacts, traditions, images and so on, in globally mediated world, does seem to share a space that indicates a collective imagination. Yes, there is shared sentiment of consumption that definitely smacks of Indian traditions and culture, but could this sharedness lead to a sense of community? Can people united in their life-styles and consumptive patterns, however traditional and indicative of all things Indian, be considered a community?

There is tendency, (Faist, 2001, pointed out this tendency) to look at interpersonal networks that are significantly denser in a transnational space leading to criss-crossing social fields which unite people from one nation to the other as being transnational community. Often the scholarship that explored this aspect of networks, both interpersonal and institutional, have attributed aspects and attributes that are in the nature of a community to this single space of shared space (Rouse, Portes, Olwig, Levitt). In the words of Peggy Levit:

Transnational communities arise from the strong, interpersonal networks through which migration begins. As these networks strengthen and spread, they develop into larger communities of individuals who are more loosely tied to one another. If individuals do not know each other personally, they can generally identify family members or acquaintances they have in common. Actual movement is not a requirement for community membership. Migration transforms sending-community life such that some nonmigrants also adopt the values and practices of their migrant counterparts and carry out aspects of their lives across space (1999:4)

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She elaborates, however, that when using the term community she does not wish to imply that all members feel a sense of affinity or solidarity toward one another. The divisiveness and hierarchical nature of all social groups also characterizes transnational communities." Her principle proposition is that the interpersonal networks spread and develop into larger communities of individuals. Usually the networks develop as many migrants come from the same place, like a village and tend to settle around the same neighbourhood, in the host country and soon develop interpersonal networks and communication. She also adds that the geographical place need not be restricted to a village but may be dispersed as in a region or a larger place and space such as nation. "Sometimes groups also form between migrants and non-migrants who are geographically dispersed in the host country but feel linked to one another by their common place of origin and their shared religious ties" (Levitt; ibid).

Most of the scholarship that explored the idea of transnational community had as its focus fairly homogenous communities whether they are Mexican (Rouse; 1989, Massey; 1994) or Dominicans (Portes; 1999 Levitt; 2001, Grasmuck; 1991), and hardly any scholarship on the transnational social ties among the Indian community, except by Levitt who refers to the transnational Gujarati community, in her analysis of different types of transnational formations. Levitt looks at Gujaratis as forming a transnational clan. Based on the experience and the case of the Gujratis she also opines that owing to diversity, ethnic and linguistic, in India. "Transnational attachments are likely to be directed towards a particular region or village and cities within it" (Levitt: Ibid). In the case of Gujratis though there is high level of economic and residential assimilation in the host country, Levitt adds that they remain socially isolated and tend to socialise with fellow Indians. "Most of their activities revolving around religious and cultural organisations they have
formed. The requirement of membership in many of these groups, and the substantive content of their activities isolate members from the host society and constantly reminds them of their attachment to Gujarat” (ibid: 16).

While at one level the Indians (not restricted to any one ethnicity or linguistic group) that we explored, both in Delhi and Chicago share a certain consumptive space and engage in creating a notion of tradition that, depending on contexts, expresses an identity which can be called Hindu/Indian, there are wheels within wheels in such articulation of Indianness or any ‘communnitiness that has at it’s base a primordial connection. A Bengali marrying a Tamil might want to include certain features of rituals that represent the Bengali identity. Similarly, the Tamil also would seek to represent his/her identity through similar evocation of traditions and rituals. They may amicably combine them, sometimes they are negotiations and tussles in such mixes of rituals but what is of significance as we pointed out is that as cultures get dehinged from their settings they expand in their references to the ‘other’. If you are in prescribed setting where one’s social position is set, rituals are followed by way of habit and as part of habitus that indicate one’s social position in society, but where the audiences and participants seem to be expanding in their otherness it becomes necessary to have markers that separate them from the others. Thus in the context of an Indian who wants to show his American audiences how “traditional, family oriented and spectacular” Indian wedding can be, a combination of bits and pieces that represent the gamut of India serves a purposes, both as separating oneself from the other (the other here being the West ) and as internalised orientalism of India.

In another context it might be valorisation of folk elements in an attempt to say that one is rooted and authentic, however urban and cosmopolitan, in a
postmodern deferential to alternatives and the indigenous. In this deference to roots is an attempt to separate oneself from the mainstream and to homogenisation. This aspect can be seen in Delhi or in Chicago.

Sumita, is a second generation Indian American, she is a Bengali married to a Punjabi that decided to move back to India, after being born and brought up in US (mainly Chicago) I met her in the course of my fieldwork, in her South Delhi home with her husband and child. Since her parents were in constant touch with families in India and the periodic visits with her family gave “a sense of where her roots are and life in India”. Sumita typically moves between her husband’s Punjabi family, a smattering of her Bengali relatives in Delhi, many in Calcutta and her grand mother’s native town in rural Bengal”. Her Social network group on the internet connects her the social fields of her relatives, in Delhi, Chicago, Chandighar, Calcutta, Burdwan and also to her colleagues, and friends. She cannot say exactly how she would like to identify herself. ‘Just when she begins to feel that she is Indian, living in India, she realizes that she is as much an American, as she is Bengali, a Punjabi by alliance, A South Asian, as she is an active member of South Asian journalist group, as she is a Delhite, when she attends the parent teacher’s meeting in her child’s school. She is a woman from the East of India, when she has to deal with the patriarchy that is writ large in North India, where she is living now’. Sumita’s case may not be typical of all the people and families I interviewed and interacted with but in general a singular identity based, on nation, ethnicity, religion language did not come to the fore, not only in the way people expressed their identity self-consciously or by habit. Some of our transnational agents were as much comfortable with their many identities, as they seem to evoke certain roots or traditions.
Given these fluid identities and affinities that people seem to form and belong to, it seems an overstatement to use the notion of community to the dense networks that brought home and abroad into single social field. Despite the noticeable levels of similarity of consumptive spaces, we can not say clearly that shared sentiments can be seen as forming a *community*. One notices several affiliations that can be seen as community but each of these identities overlap and intersect with other identities that produced a segmented and disjunctured sense of being and belonging. In the case of India where identities are overlapping and segmented by the very nature of the society, it is difficult to have an overarching sense of belonging to any one community and the transnational spaces with the mediation modern technologies offers the possibilities of exploring identities which may have been seen as marginal.

Thus, while our transnational agent may involve in creating a sense of Indianess through the performances of rituals by including various regional variations the affirmation is not a singular identity as much as acknowledgement of plurality of beings. Also the borrowing of traditions or mix and match of traditions; mehendi ceremony, cocktail parties and dresses etc. is not so much a conscious avowal of plurality and an interplay of hybridity as it is the dissemination of culture; of images, artifacts, possible in this age of hypercommunication. It is acknowledgement of meanings that are contained for various people in various settings. While bhangra might be an identity marker, a hip cultural root and affirmation of *punjabiyan* (the essence of being a Punjabi) for the working class Sikh in Birmingham or Toronto for the urban young professional of Delhi it is a familiar cultural artifact that is now riding the high waves of urban cool. The platform that allows sharing of such diverse sentiments, for example, is a slew of Bollywood films, which have used the motif of bhangra and woven a whole narrative around it, weddings can be another of those sites for interplay of shared yet diverse
sentiments and meanings that somewhat hark back to the root of Indian culture or tradition. While there is root element to this interplay, in reality there are so many varieties of cultural elements that do not necessarily have the geographic allegiance to the nation or to Hindu or Indian culture. It is more like what is currently in circulation. For all we know before long wedding gown might suddenly become the way to do an Indian wedding, obviously bypassing the traditional Indian attires. Indians had in the past adopted chillies, tea and English too, even though only in pockets, and made it their own.

The fluid nature of culture and tradition, the multi locality of being here and there, the socioeconomic contexts of home and host country, produce ever changing representations. The representations among the diaspora according to Stuart Hall provide an imaginary coherence for a set of malleable identities. In a similar way Appadurai and Brekenridge argue that whatever their form or trajectory, diaspora always leave a tail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment. Yet, these collective memories and new maps do not always serve to consolidate identities. They write “even for apparently well-settled diasporic groups, the macro politics of reproduction translates in to micro politics of memory, among friends and generations. The many trajectories produce very fissured and fractured identities. Schiller, Basch and Blanc- Szanton argue:

With their complex web of social relations, transmigrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities, grounded both in their society of origin and in the host societies. While some migrants identity more with one society than the other, the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously with more than one nation. By maintaining different racial, national, ethnic identities, transmigrants
are able to express their resistance to global political and economic situations that engulf them (1992:11).

The fractured and fluid identities that are characterise the likes of Sumita, that we recounted above seems to be the nature of identity articulation among the transnationally located middle class Indian families that we explored.