Chapter 1
Introduction

This study is based on an ethnographic research of the Indian middle class families in two sites. The two sites are Delhi and Chicago. The focus of this study is on lifecycle rituals of the middle class Indians, more specifically the consumption that surrounds these rituals. Consumption with its semiotic potential of conveying many meanings and serving as markers of identity is worthy of exploration and analysis, with a view to understand the way identities are expressed among this group of people.

On the face of it, this study may seem like an addition to the proliferating writings on consumption and consumerism among the middle class in globalising India (see Mankekar, 1998, 1999; Mazzarella, 2003; Lietchy, 2003; Chaudhuri, 2005) Some other ways this study may appear to fall under the rubric of writings on the Indian diaspora (Motwani, 1993; Raj, 2003; Parekh et al, 2004, Dubey, 2003; Jayaram, 2004, Lal et al, 2007\(^1\)). And in many ways this study may strike as a standard fare of Indian sociological writing on family, tradition and modernisation (Uboeri, 1994; Seymour, 1999; Das et al, 2003; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1984) However, this study breaks away from earlier issues and preoccupation in sociological and anthropological writings, yet it persists with them in newer contexts. It is only in order that the contexts need to be delineated at the outset. What constitutes the break in this study is the distinct conjuncture in space and time that it is located in. That is the transnational space: a space that is facilitated by the

\(^1\) The list of publication is not a comprehensive list of writings on Indian diaspora, of which there is vast collection, however these are some of the recent writings which look at the social landscape of the Indian diaspora across the globe.
processes of globalisation. We look at transnational setting in which the interacting global forces throw up the very same issues that have been the mainstay of discussion in sociological and anthropological writings, for instance, the notion of community. It is argued (Fischer and Abedi, 1990; Rouse, 1991; Grassmuck and Pressar, 1991; Brown, 1991) that the notion of community is being refigured in newer contexts that transcends the idea of geography of space, and the idea of real face-to-face communication. Virtuality and transborder affiliations and networks have given new meanings to the traditional notion of community. Families now are interacting over distances calling to attention the way families interacted in the traditional contexts of bounded communities. Levitt (2007), who takes stock of various studies on transnational migration, concludes that more and more aspects of social life take place across borders. It is the transnational space that becomes our context and focus of investigation.

1.1 Context

There are various play of forces, institutions and actors that make up the transnational space, which effectively bring home and abroad together in newer ways than before. Our focus is consumption around rituals among the middle class families in two settings – Delhi and Chicago. We believe that the intersecting worlds of home-abroad bring together new eddies in the way rituals are performed and reveal newer expressions of identity articulation, mediated as they are by new technologies and new contexts. We also believe that the transnational space occupied by the Indians, both in Delhi and Chicago, is signified by a shared space of consumption. Could this shared space articulate and expresses itself into affiliations of solidarity, a community of sorts? We undertake a study of the consumption around rituals, since consumption with it multivocality reveals many things about self and society.
But first, it would help to examine in cursory way the context and mainstay of our argument.

Transnational space and the related term transnationalism is said to capture a condition in which despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders, certain kinds of relationships are globally intensifying and have become denser between places and people. Separate places have become effectively a single space through continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information. This transnational space, aided by globalised world of flows, offers a field of interaction, which is circumventing and is a leap out of the geographical place. According to many studies, even though people are separated by distance, transnational spaces and flows allow people to effectively operate, feel and think like communities, (Fischer and Abedi, 1990; Rouse, 1991; Grassmuck and Pressar, 1991; also Brown 1991),. The continuous exchange and flow between migrants and their relatives back home makes possible a social field that is composite and which effectively eliminates the time/space distance. Whether this intensified interaction and the composite social space can be evidence enough for such interactions to be treated as a community is another question. What is the nature of the social fields of Indians who live abroad and the Indians who are transnationally connected, is still a question? How do home and abroad influence each other?

Much of the literature on Indian migration has been on the diaspora who have left India, only to have minimal and symbolic contact with the notion of India and India as a nation (Magru, 1987; Motwani, 1992; Kondapi, 1951; Kuper, 1960; Klass, 1961; Saha, 1970; Tinker, 1974, 1977, 1990). That is changing now with increased contacts between home and abroad, through several types of flows – people, capital, finances, images, ideas and goods. The transnational space occupied by the Indian immigrants and their kin now straddles not any one single place but includes both home and abroad.
However what exactly constitutes this space is still not clear as far as the Indian diaspora is concerned, as there are hardly any comprehensive studies that capture the transnational nature of connection between migrants and people at home.

Some studies (Ballard 1994a; Clarke et al. 1990; Van der Veer 1995), especially from the Manchester School, did recognise that the social life of the immigrants extended beyond the territories of nation-state to their home country and even to their village, but these studies were not undertaken with a transnational perspective where the mainstay of the argument is that home and abroad effectively become one single space. However, in the recent past a few studies do seem to point out to aspects of global connections that implicate the diasporic communities. Some studies\(^2\) have looked into networks established over space and time by the immigrants that serve social capital for upward mobility (Ballard, 2001; Zachariah and Rajan 2001; Xiang, 2005; Gallo, 2005; Supriya Singh, 2006). These few studies, which have attempted to capture the transnational connections, have more or less restricted to capturing the diasporic condition with regard to specific situatedness of the actors in one locale. This captures the transnational condition but does not give details of situational differences between two nodes or hubs.

The transnational space is indeed a social field which connects the world of people living across distance. A social field may be thought of as a series of inter-connecting relationships, all of which in some way influence one another. The transnational space then is two places connected and united in to one single social field. Levitt and Schiller who studied transnational links say:

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\(^2\) The various studies on the transnational aspect of migrant social life will be deal in detail in our chapter on review of literature.
The concept of social field is a 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 into a domain of interactions where individuals who do not move themselves maintain social relations across borders through various forms of communication. By conceptualizing 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 sets 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 (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:608).

Hardly any studies exist that capture the transnational space occupied by people at micro level, which truly indicate the lived everyday experience of a space that cuts across borders. A space that extends the diasporic Indians' life to not only the contexts of the place he/she inhabits but extending to territories far beyond.

While acknowledging that larger institutional structures play their part in transnationalism authors Gardner and Grillo argue that "attention on the public arena of politics or citizenship at the expense of more domestic and private activities, often inadvertently giving prominence to men at the expense of women" (Gardner and Grillo, 2002: 182). Also, it is through micro analysis that we can understand global articulations of ethnicity, identity, and hierarchies of class, caste and gender and see 'why people do what they do'.

The families as a micro unit has been studied among other communities (Rouse, 1991; Grassmuck and Pressar 1991, however there have been no full-fledged studies of transnational Indian family as a focus for micro analysis. A few that have talked about the family have analysed it obliquely, in the
context of migration and its relation to marriage and kinship networks. Many of these studies are specific to Great Britain (Ballard, 2001; Charsley and Shaw, 2006) there are no comprehensive studies on the transnational fields of the diaspora from US. Considering how the NRI from US is a huge figure in the public consciousness of the Indians at home, there is an urgent need to study this transnational space between families in the US and in India. And now, more than before, the Indian middle class is straddling the transnational flows, engaging with home and abroad in a unified way. The world of the NRI and their kin are ever more connected than before.

With liberalisation being undertaken by the Indian state in the 1990s, consumption with its social significances and as an indicator of middle class mobility has become crucial for analysis. The role of liberalisation of economy in aiding the growth of middle class has been well debated and documented (Deshpande 1998; Kulkarni 1993; Lakha 1999; Fernandes, 2006). With the liberalisation and entry of India into transnational economy, there is has been an opening up of the economy. This essentially meant entry of big corporations with their transnational activities of production, exchange and finance in India. A significant change for the Indian economy among host of other things has been the shifts in labour market. This can be seen especially in the growth of the service sector, especially services related to computer technologies. “The service sector according to some estimates accounted for 52% of the Indian GDP. The expansion of the service sector and the professional, white-collar private sector employment has been fundamentally linked with the rise of the new Indian middle class”(Fernandes, 2006:89). There has been an increase in the job market in such service sectors and also an increase in salaries of white collar workers (ibid). These white collar employees now work in plush offices of Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and other urban centres which are part of the global network of transnational
economy. The mobile middle classes now earn salaries that allow them to take vacations abroad, have holiday homes and modular kitchens, and spend vast amounts on weddings and celebrations. In general they can now have a lifestyle that could only be had, by the NRIs. They have disposable incomes and lifestyles that have become emblematic of what middle class can aspire for.

The middle class of post liberalisation bear the historical trajectories and internal differentiation of caste, ethnicity, gender and religion, what makes them distinct is their aspirations and strategies to gain entry in the restructuring Indian economy in the transnational context. The strategies of mobility and entry into the transnational economies can be both material and symbolic, which are then converted to create, as Bourdieu (1984) argued, ‘classificatory practices’ that preserve their social position and further their mobility. The dynamic nature of the mechanisms and processes involved in this process makes the boundaries fluid and open to contestation even though historical inequalities structure the boundaries.

Also with liberalisation, Indian economy is being touted as the second fastest growing economy at large. The idea of India and “India” as a brand is something that the upwardly mobile Indians, both the NRIs and the ones living in urban India, are proud to wear on their sleeves.

Apart from this, recent events such as 9/11, 7/7 have called to attention the nature of identity: you could be a citizen of a nation that you have migrated to but culturally and emotionally be still attached to the country of origin, or one can be a bit of both; of home and of a host nation. Not only are right-wing Muslims, Christian evangelist or the traveling community of Hindu priest or

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This sentiment ‘that they can now have a lifestyle only an NRI can have’ was expressed by a few of the corporate professionals I interviewed in the course of the field study.
fundamentalist Hindus, who are implicated in this crisscrossing world, but also the everyday diasporic Indian, who might continue to wear a traditional attire, continue to consume many things which resonate home – food, music, movies etc, and be a successful professional and a citizen of US or UK. This success is valorised back home, seen from the sound bytes and print coverage to the Indian who lives elsewhere but who is claimed as being part of the Indian community, or whatever ethnicity one belongs to. The valorisation of the successful Indian migrant can be seen in the Indian State’s attempt to court the diasporic Indians. And for those who left India, it is now possible to live the life of an Indian without having to necessarily recreate or invent through nostalgia, memory and hybridisation, the origins, roots and traditions they have left behind. They now occupy a space which allows them to be in both places, through various spaces of inhabitation. It is this space that the Indian middle class inhabits that we were interested to explore.

It is in this context that consumption and lifestyle of the mobile middle class becomes significant, expressed both in subjective dimension of actor’s agency and objective dimensions of larger globalising forces. While there are many discursive elements in the process of identity articulations and distinctions of social standing what we have chosen to study are the rituals, which involve consumption. Culture and traditions are implicated in this pursuit of lifestyle. Various business and services have launched themselves into the burgeoning market of celebration and culture, which is what sets apart the way rituals are celebrated these days.

Rituals always involved consumption of goods and symbolic acts, but never have they been propelled by global economies as in recent past. Not necessarily ritual per se but culture as such has come into the marketing purview of business enterprise. One has to only look around to see how little-
known festivals, traditions or aspects of culture have been commercialised all over the globe. India is not far behind with a surfeit of traditions and practices lending themselves to marketability. Diwali with all its associated practices and ritual performances is a classic example of commercialisation of a cultural practice. Family oriented rituals like the wedding ceremony is now a multi-crore business that aims to reach the global Indian audience. Not only these, but little known, subdued and specific performances are also getting noticed, imbibed and fore-grounded in public consumptive space, and often through the mediation of media.

Mobilisation of resources involving goods and people is an important aspect of a ritual performance and in a transnational setting it gains added significance. This is because of the strategic reasons of gathering people and resources across distances, as well as because of the necessity of articulating identity in transnational global context. The resources used then are significant as markers and indicators of that space of negotiation, and articulation, be it class, caste, ethnicity or gender, among other things. Thus consumption that surrounds rituals is a concomitant aspect of ritual. It is the consumptive aspect of ritual that we are interested in exploring among the middle class Indian – the ones who migrated as well as the ones who stayed back. “Rituals are a fertile terrain through which participants may creatively work through the meaning of modernity (or ‘tradition’) and navigate the individual and collective transformations wrought by migration under conditions of transnationalism” (Grillo and Gardner, 2002:187). According to Appadurai, (1996) the global flows – of media, capital, ideas, finance and people – mediate the ‘social imaginary’ of the people.

The practice of life-cycle rituals involves relationships and issues of culture, tradition, ethnicity, gender and class/status. Rituals involve exchanges, gift-
giving and appropriate and customary way of doing things, all of which involve resources. Rituals, especially life cycle rituals surrounding birth, marriage and death are essential social practices, nearly universal in all cultures. The rituals of life-crisis are the practices that are intimately tied to the family.

Certain aspect of trans-border family relations have been captured in the context of Indian diaspora, though in a nominal way; issues like remittances and family (mostly from economic angle, see Singh, 2006), marriage and transnational networks and its many implications (see Palriwal and Uberoi, 2005) have been analysed. For our analysis we have chosen to examine life-cycle rituals as sites of practices that reveal and implicate various aspects of self and society.

As we already mentioned, micro analysis involving the social world of domestic life gives us a nuanced and layered articulation of hierarchies and identities, mediated as they are by global flows and structures. The family, especially the middle class Indian family is at the cusp of these global flows. The family, as a concept, especially in the Indian context, is difficult to pin down (see Shah, 1998), as it connotes not only nuclear family, but it could include several levels of familial relations, consanguineous and affinal that may extend beyond the household. This similar complexity extends and becomes a complex aspect of transnational fields of the Indians. But even the recent studies on the Indian family (Shah, 1998; Patel, 2005) do not discuss the transnational aspect of family. Meenakshi Thapan's (2005) book on Transnational Migration and the Politics of Identity does refer to the gendered aspects of family in the transnational contexts but again the focus is not really on the transnational social fields of the ones who migrate and the

\footnote{see Sinha-Kerkhoff and also Rayaprol writings in Thapan's edited volume.}
ones who stay back. While there is general recognition that the Indian
migrants have continuing interactions with people back home, what exactly
constitutes the micro level interactions is still not documented and examined.

A transnational family is different from an ordinary immigrant family. The
defining factor is not the act of cross border movement of the family, but the
dispersion of the family, nuclear or extended, across international borders,
where different family members spend time in one or the other country
depending on various factors. The study takes a closer look at the
transnational experience of family life as it relates to economic, political,
Social and cultural factors. In this respect, we tried to examine the impact
transnational family experience has on various actors involved. The
generational differences as well gender differences are examined in this
context. Not to mention the various practices that are inscribed such as caste,
kinship patterns, and ethnicity (Dube, 1997; Palriwal and Uberoi, 2005; Patel,
2005). We examine these aspects in the everyday life of the family members
that are transnationally located. “When we study migration rather than
abstract cultural flows or representations, we see that the transnational
processes are located within the life experience of individuals and families,
making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears, and
achievements” (Bach et al, 1995). Thus, our central question for examining
the transnational space is:

What exactly are these spaces that are inhabited by the migrants which make
them transnational in their orientation, different from the earlier disporas? In
what way do home and abroad come together to make possible a single social
field that cuts across borders? In what way do flows and forces of
globalization, seen in the patterns of consumption around rituals express and
articulate identities among Indians living in Delhi and Chicago? To answer
these questions we have chosen to take an ethnographic study of social spaces inhabited by Indians living in more than one place.

If we want to understand how circulation of people, goods, ideas, images and money influence home and abroad, it is important to study both home and abroad to fully grasp the way they intersect and connect. To fully capture the lived everyday social fields of the family one needs to undertake multi-sited ethnography. Multisited ethnography is then our natural methodological choice as it involves a perspective that allows a viewing of interconnections between separate geographical spaces forming a single social field. We will be elaborating on this aspect of methodology and my own situatedness in this context, in the third chapter, which is devoted to a detailed review of literature and the methodology involved. We feel it suffice to say, at this point, that multi-sited ethnography is necessary to fully appreciate the transnationality of the actors involved. Peggy Leviit who has been writing about the social fields of transnational migrants believes that studying the social fields of migrants involves methodological shifts. She writes “our analytical lens must necessarily broaden and deepen because migrants are embedded in a multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, “encompassing those who move and those who stay behind” (emphasis not in original quote). Also, “to understand the strength, nature and impact of the ties the field has to be investigated empirically” (Levitt, 2004:596). The very essence of transnationality is that the life-worlds of immigrants as well as the one who stay back are equally implicated in the global flows. Transnationalism is grounded in daily lives, activities and social relationship of migrants (see Basch, 1994) Therefore any investigation in these transnational fields necessitates a multi-sited ethnography, hence our choice of two sites for investigation, namely Delhi and Chicago.
1.2 Review of Literature of the Transnational Space of the Indians

To be able to spell out our point departure from the existing literature on the Indian diaspora, more specifically on the transnationally connected Indians in the US, we need to undertake a review of literature. This will also help us to see in what way the writings on Indian diaspora have examined the social fields of transnational Indians. Our main concern is with the way transnational settings and contexts implicate the articulation of social hierarchies and differences and identities. As we already pointed out the idea was to garner these articulations through an analysis of life-cycle rituals and the consumption that surrounds it.

The literature on Indian diaspora is vast and varied capturing the variations within the Indian diaspora. There is a great deal of writing on the diaspora that has left Indian shores during the colonial times. For the purpose of delineating the main focus of our study, we will examine the literature on Indian diaspora as it relates to the transnational experience of middle class Indians, in this chapter. In our subsequent chapter we will examine the literature on Indian diaspora that includes not only migrants from colonial period, who since have become citizens of their host country (also known as old diaspora), but also the more recent migrants who have emigrated mainly to the West.

At the outset, it must be said that an overview of the literature on Indian diaspora reveals a preponderance of writers residing outside India. Many of whom are diasporic and so write about the contexts and experience of diaspora condition in the host country (Ballard, 1994; Kurien, 2007; Raj, 2003; Shukla, 2007; Maira, 2002; Prashad, 2000; Rangaswamy, 2000).
The location of the author in what seems like a transnationally oriented global world seems like a moot point, but it is nevertheless of significance that many writers and researchers on the Indian diaspora are located in the West and as such are biased to see things from the vantage point of one located in the host country. I do like to add here that my own transnational location of going back and forth between Chicago and Delhi offered me a vantage point. Being in both places and having had a fair amount of exposure had allowed me to be part of the transnational space that the study refers to. However, we do have some studies that offer a comprehensive overview of the diasporic situation and contexts that are not necessarily located in any specific socio-historical conditions of a region or country.

Jayaram’s edited volume *The Indian Diaspora: Dynamics of Migration* offers a comprehensive picture of the diachronic changes and processes in the Indian diaspora situation. The book covers many substantive aspects of the contexts and social background of the Indian diaspora in various regions of the world. The volume is useful for an understanding of socio-cultural patterns and dynamics that point to specific evolution of varied Indian communities abroad. However the volume does not necessarily address the transnational nature of Indian diaspora in a way that takes stock of the interconnected social fields. Besides, there is no specific contribution that talks of the transnationally oriented migrant situation in US, which we are interested in. Another edited volume (Parekh et al, 2003) on Indian diaspora – *Culture and Economy in Indian Diaspora* – takes a dialectical look at the interplay of culture and economy in the way diasporic communities engage with their host countries as well as with home. Lessinger’s writing in this volume on transnationality of the migrants who reside in US is contemporary in its focus and scope. He feels that the situations and conditions in “US society itself also

14
contributes to these transnational orientations in two ways. On one hand, an American culture which sees itself as a collection of distinct ethnic groups (and conversely encourages ethnic competition must inevitably place a certain pressure on immigrant groups to retain ethnicity and to validate their authenticity (Lessinger, 2003:172)" the authenticity is maintained and validated by constant touch with India and things Indian. The connection with India are revealed in the way all things Indian are consumed and which echo Indian consumption pattern. Lessinger also believes that ethnic identity is maintained through a range of ethnic organisations – political, religious, cultural and professional – which keep Indian immigrants simultaneously connected to each other and to India. He writes;

What is remarkable about these organizations and events tailored to the American scene and to the creation of Indian immigrant identity abroad is the extent to which they are also interwoven with Indian immigrant transnationalism, suggesting the extent to which first generation continues to inhabit a social universe stretching to encompass parts of India as a well as US. The commercial enclaves faithfully mirror Indian taste, showing off the latest fashion in clothing, jewellery, making the newest movies available on videos within weeks of their release in India. Bollywood stars, classical musicians, bhangra groups, Indian rappers and Indian religious figures regularly tour US in summer ...so do Indian political figures. Everyone from heroic generals to the chief ministers of Indian state wooing NRI investment, to Hindutva ideologues seeking to raise support and funds’ from conservative Indians, eventually makes an appearance somewhere in US, traveling circuit delineated by location of Indian immigrant organizations and networks (ibid:174).
Conversely the heightened awareness of the NRI success has seeped into the public consciousness and for the Indian state, such that the NRIs become a reference point of success and migration as a way of upward mobility.

As can be seen from the detailed quotes from Lessinger’s writing on the transnationality of US immigrant that he is aware of the simultaneity and mirroring of consumption among the immigrants and their counterparts in India. However the study is not substantive one and it does not engage with the embedded and situated actors, whose reasons and motives in everyday settings are not known. As we already mentioned that the macro transnational process are contained and unfold in the micro, everyday settings of family, which is really the woof and warp of the transnationalism.

Some other studies have looked at the intersecting worlds of home and abroad in the area of economy, remittances in particular, and in terms of family and marriage and also in terms of media. We will take a look at some these studies here before we take up a detailed review in our subsequent chapter. The transnational connections and the intersecting world of home and abroad have been highlighted in some of the articles in a series of studies on migration and family (Palriwal and Uberoi, 2005). The series explores the migration patterns and its implication for family and gender at large. Kalpagam’s (2005) study in the volume talks about Tamil Brahmin community and how an NRI groom is sought after, as a way of acquiring social capital and as clear sign of upward mobility. Xiang’s article talks about “the gender relations prevalent in Andhra Pradesh, particularly the institution of dowry, have been critical in producing a specially cheap and flexible labour force, and in supporting it in the volatile global economy. In turn, the emergence of a group of mobile IT professionals contributes to the increase of dowry, with disturbing consequences for those underprivileged and seemingly unconcerned with the IT industry” (Xiang
2005: 357). Gallos’ study of Malyali women in Italy finds that their status is improved with their relatives, as they are viewed as means to upward mobility by rest of their kin. But for those brides who go as dependents on H1 B visas to US, there is a constant negotiation and subversion of family networks with outcomes that are not always promising for the women involved (Jain, 2006).

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). Sujata Moorti says that Bollywood cinema “enables a representational archive that is simultaneously familiar, alien, domestic, national and transnational. This formulation goes beyond a new way of seeing and underscores how the crosscutting forces of transnational capital and media produce subjects and publics that are no longer confined within the representational politics of a single geographic nation” (Moorti, 2003:356). There are many movies coming out of Bombay that engage with the trials and travails of the diasporic Indian. Punthambekar believes that this entry signals 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” (Punathambekar, 2003:152).

The economic exchanges and the dense interactions that are result of such exchanges have been discussed in general. More specifically certain studies (Helweg, 1983; Thandi, 2006; Matthew and Prashad, 2000; Singh, 2006) have written about NRI money flowing into India. While Matthew and Prashad’s (see also Rajgopal, 1997), writings is on NRI funding Sangh Parivar, Thandi points to the development initiatives of the migrant community in to their native villages and towns. Supriya Singh talks of the importance of studying
remittances from abroad and the implications it has for family including the care of the elderly and points out to the lack of such studies.

The above literature that we have examined is restricted to more contemporary nature of Indian diaspora and to the transnational aspect of the migrants. This, as is obvious, is not an exhaustive review of literature. A detailed and elaborate review has been undertaken subsequently – Chapter 3 – where we have looked at the literature that examines the diaspora situation in general as well as to more specific transnational settings in the hope of gleaning some insights from the literature. The cursory review here does indicate what our point of departure should be in studying the nature of identity of the upwardly mobile middle class Indian.

1.3 Rationale for Undertaking the Study

From the preceding survey of literature one can easily garner that the space occupied by diaspora is indeed transnational; at once embracing territories that are separated by actual boundaries and the geography of place, but nevertheless occupying a plane of everyday reality. And it is this precise space or social field that we have explored. While there is some amount of recognition of this transnational space, there are very few actual studies of the transnational social spaces occupied by the Indian diaspora. Our reasons and rationale for undertaking a study of transnational social fields of middle class Indian family can be outlined as thus:

Lacunae in existing literature: Existing literature on transnationally connected Indians, in the area of religion, kinship and family culture and religion, has explored the transnationality in passing but there are no studies that examine the social field empirically, in a multisited investigation. Besides
many of the writings on transnational Indian writings come from the standpoint of the diasporas in the contexts of the host countries and how they creatively engage with the home. As we already mentioned much of the scholarship on Indian diaspora or the transnationally located Indian comes from the West. This gives it a bias that it is informed by their location in the West. Also the literature is restricted to capturing the diasporic condition with regard to specific situatedness of the actors in one locale. This captures the transnational condition but does not give details of situational differences between two nodes or hubs, to use Castelle's analogy. Sandya Shukla,⁵ (2003) in her book India Abroad, acknowledges that she "identifies United States and United Kingdom as the foci of Indian diaspora... to narrow the inquiry of the book" (Shukla, 2003:4). She adds that "United States and England may be sites for expression of locality, they are, however, cross-cut, always, by forces from other worlds" (ibid).

Besides, most of these studies barely touch the connections that seem to be growing between Indians at home and abroad. Usually the accounts of this home abroad connection have captured the organisational, institutional, transnational connections at macro levels and very few have studied what Alejandro Portes calls globalisation 'from below' or what we consider as transnational spaces at micro level. These lacunae in the existing literature prompt us to undertake an empirical field based study of transnational social fields.

⁵ Sandya Shukla strongly feels that diasporic studies cannot confine itself to traditional notions of site or field. She writes that "the book (India Abroad) develops a sphere of representation that traverses other boundaries too, of eam an west, first and third world. Diaspora then provides a different kind of field site from those of past anthropological preoccupations. Situated within and across a range of nations, Indian diasporic lives come to embody a set of disconnections between places, cultures and identity" (Shukla, 2003:4).
Changing nature of identities in transnational settings: The global migrations and the immigrant enclaves, the multicultural conditions and politics and the hyphenated identities throw into relief the changing nature of identity formations, in transnational context. The cataclysmic event of 9/11 and similar such events across the world have brought into sharp focus the nature of nation, national loyalties and cross-border affiliations that are becoming a feature of the interconnected world of globalisation. In the multicultural settings where ethnic identities are valorised, the markers deployed to create boundaries that affirm differences are significant. Yet these very multicultural settings also demand nation and citizenship loyalties in some other situations. For example, many Indian immigrants in US proudly display their Indianess or celebrate Indian identity by public displays such as parades, festival celebrations but these very Indians are wary of such displays at work situations or other instances. The Indian immigrants made sure that the American flag was displayed loud and clear soon after 9/11 in the 'Little India' enclaves of Chicago, for instance. The situational and contextual display of identities not just in terms of national identities but regional or ethnic identities is best captured through an ethnographic account of actors' agency and their embedded contexts. Rituals observances by immigrant and their kin, serves as a site in which various aspects of identity and notions of tradition and community are played out and contested, which is the reason we chose to study rituals.

The notion of community: The idea of culture and geographical space was seen as isomorphic whole in traditional anthropological and sociological writings. With deterritorialisation\(^6\), culture is moving with people, the

\(^6\) Deluze and Guattari first used this term deterritorialisation (1972) in a psychoanalytical, philosophical sense to mean that there is “no original sense”. The term since then has been appropriated by anthropologist and others. When anthropologists use the term deterritorialisation they refer to a weakening of ties between culture and place. This means the removal of cultural subjects and objects from a certain location in space and time. It implies
isomorphic notion of boundedness of culture and community is being questioned and is seen as problematique. The bounded aspect of societies – both in terms of place/locality and culture is being affected by the interconnected world (Thornton, 1988; Clifford, 1992; and Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). If the traditional boundedness of a community is taken away, how do communities produce and feel a sense ‘we-ness without homogenous shared space? As we mentioned, studies on immigrant communities and their increased contacts back home have likened the contacts to communities, however transnational. Alejandro Portes, analysing the economic origins of transnational communities concludes that the cumulative result of an initial economic ventures is the transformation of immigrants into transnational communities...“characterized by dense network across space by an increasing number of people who lead dual lives...move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries and pursue economic political and cultural interest that require simultaneous presence in both” (Portes, 1996:160). He further states that these distinct interactions between migrant communities are unlike their previous mechanism of adaptation.

Faist (2003) on the other hand contends there are several activities that are subsumed under the various terms that explain transnationalism. He says that 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. For instance, he points out that the term transnational social space and transnational communities are used simultaneously “as if ‘transnational community’ (Portes, 1996) was the only form or type of transnational social space.

that certain cultural aspects tend to transcend specific territorial boundaries in a world that consists of things fundamentally in motion. TH-16720
Portes does say that the increased contacts between home and abroad are different from the previous disporas, something that we have been pointing out too. But what exactly are these differences, what way have the earlier mechanisms of survival and adaptation changed for the immigrants in their home country. And in what way have the increased contacts between their immigrant cousins changed for the middle class families in India. Apart from this point of departure a questions that we ned to ask is; do increased contacts between home and abroad create 'transnational community?' There exists a taken for granted notion of the transnational community rather than any substantive studies on the transnational social fields.

1.4 Studying Transnational Social Fields: Scope and Focus

It is evident from preceding overview of literature that the transnationalism is increasingly under the scrutiny of various disciplines. While there is a plethora of writing on various aspects and with varying perspectives one is left with the feeling that we are still in the incipient stages of understanding what exactly constitute the life-worlds of the transnational Indian communities.

To truly understand what transnational means and the implications of this for the people involved we need to consider activities and relationships within households or families. To reiterate our point that was made earlier, it is through micro analysis that we can understand global articulations of ethnicity, identity, and hierarchies of class, caste and gender and see 'why people do what they do'. The family as a micro unit has been studied among other communities; however, there have been no full-fledged studies of transnational Indian family as a focus of micro analysis. Since we do not have clear point of departure from the earlier studies, having practically no multi-
sited exploration on Indian diaspora, the study is exploratory in nature. We do have certain questions that will help us steer the direction our investigation.

As mentioned many a times earlier, we have chosen rituals as sites of investigation for our study. The rituals of life-crisis are the practices that are intimately tied to family. Rituals are aspects of a culture, very often tied with religion too, and they are a customary way of doing things. They also reveal a tradition that articulates an ethnicity or community. However much one may not be a believer of Christianity or Hinduism when it comes to important events of life one likes to, more often than not, mark that event in what they think is an important and appropriate way. In marking that event in a particular way one is affirming, willy-nilly, an identity. Thus, a simple thing like when a wedding should be held, may mean negotiations involving tradition and practicality/perhaps commitment to work. For instance, an auspicious date decided by a priest versus a date convenient for the transnational professional, however inauspicious/non traditional it may be. A wedding may involve clash of regional practices, availability of items that echo an ethnicity, for example the availability of a mare, for the groom’s procession in a north Indian wedding. The choices of what goes into a wedding ‘performance’ may also involve what one may want to showcase. In a wedding ritual involving a north Indian groom and a Tamil Brahmin bride, whether a groom should ride a horse or whether it is alright for the bride to have mehendi ceremony, whether one wants choreographed dance a la Monsoon Wedding are all issues that concern, culture, identity, gender and class. “The study of such life-cycle rituals can tell us a great deal about the experience of being spread between places for transnational families, for it is at these moments of ‘crisis’ or change that, among other things, identity, status and interpersonal as well as internal conflict are often expressed” (Grillo and Gardner, 2002:183).
The life-cycle rituals thus make a point about success as well as about change. But they are also about continuity. Transnational rituals make statements about membership, or at least claims to ongoing membership, in the community of origin, at any rate for the time being, and these statements have both a symbolic and practical significance. We may see this in the symbolic ‘languages’ through which such statements are made, of food, clothing and colours – tangible phenomena with multiple semiotic possibilities. They are not just made, however, but also contested. For the purpose of our study we have examined some of the major rituals surrounding such events as birth, marriage and death.

Rituals as we have already mentioned, involve exchanges gift-giving and appropriate and customary way of doing things, all of which involve resources. Mobilisation of resources involving goods and people is an important aspect of a ritual performance. In a transnational setting it gains added significance, both because of the strategic reasons of gathering people and resources across distances, and also because of the necessity of articulating identity in transnational global context. The resources used then are significant as markers and indicators of that space of negotiation, and articulation, be it class, caste, ethnicity or gender, among other things. Thus consumption that surrounds rituals is a concomitant aspect of ritual.

Rituals, especially wedding rituals, it is increasingly observed, involve conspicuous consumption. Where there is mobility and acquisition of wealth, the need to display that newly acquired status seems to rise proportionally. Gardener and Grillo in their analysis of life-cycle rituals in transnational families find that there is an increase in consumption surrounding rituals by rich migrants. They write: “participation in local rituals ‘back home’ by
returned migrants or migrants who are engaged in operating transnationally frequently demand a show of resources. The Osellas’ analysis of the annual *kuthiyottam* ritual in South Kerala (Osella and Osella 2000) reveals a ‘dramatic’ rise in ritual costs with the increased participation of newly moneyed Gulf migrants” (2002:184). Many rituals in India and abroad have been taken to conspicuous levels of consumption. Behind these levels of consumption are economies and businesses which are geared towards catering to this need and which simultaneously fuel a desire for spectacle and display. Thus, our analytical scope involved various agencies and structures and institutions that mediate and are implicated in the way consumption is revealed. We have not only examined businesses and market, which fuel the consumption among our actors but also help facilitate the celebration of events, but also the media that seems to stoke the imagination of people in the observances of rituals.

With global markets reaching nearly everywhere and connecting various nodes, especially the cities and their suburbs into a single field of consumption, no doubt with their own context and situatedness, it is worthwhile to investigate in what way home and abroad are coming together in the way they consume. Thus, aspects which connect the home and abroad be it the internet or Bollywood was of interest to us. Therefore, the crisscrossing influences and forces have been highlighted when analysing the various structures and agencies that were implicated in the process of consumption.

1.5 The Objective of the Study: Themes and Questions

At the outset, it is important that it is mentioned that this study is essentially exploratory in nature. As we gathered from the review of literature, there have
been no studies so far on the ‘actual empirical’ nature of social fields of Indian diaspora. While it is acknowledged that migrants, including Indian migrants, have social fields that cross the borders of their host countries, they have not been explored specifically in the context of the Indian diaspora in United States. Therefore this study is purporting to fill existing gaps in the literature on transnational Indian community. What we hoped to explore in this study is to understand how consumption (in our case the one that surrounds rituals) articulates aspects of identity. The central aim of undertaking this study is to see how identities are being reconfigured, as home and abroad influence each other in a transnational setting. Also, we question the nature of coming together of home and abroad; whether affiliations across distance mean the formation of a community is our concomitant theme of exploration. In studying rituals we are essentially asking what do performance of the life cycle rituals tell us, especially in a transnational interconnected world. Some of the questions we have with regard to this are as follows:

- Are transnational forces and processes creating different identity formations (class, ethnicity, and gender) or reinterpreting the existing ones?
- How is distance navigated in the context of ongoing interactions between families? What new ways are deployed to engage and sustain families, if they are being sustained?
- Are the influencing forces of consumption, at home and abroad, bringing people involved into a simultaneity of shared space of consumption?
- And if there is a simultaneous consumption, is it producing a common sentiment and experience, enough for the actors involved in this space to feel as one?
• Can the people occupying a transnational space, because of their similarities and consciousness of shared sentiment be considered a community?
• What are the convergences and differences in the way rituals are articulated among the families in Chicago and in Delhi?
• Are the hybrid de-contextualised mixing and adaptation of rituals giving rise to new forms of traditional practices, perhaps some pan-Indian traditions?
• In what way is gender implicated in the performances of these rituals and in these intersecting worlds in general?
• In what way is the political economy of business and market aiding the articulation of traditions, and the expressions of identity?

1.6 Field of Investigation

To truly capture the transnational space of the immigrants and their families back home it is necessary to investigate the intersecting worlds. The cities that we have chosen, which in essence are like two nodes in an interconnected world, are Delhi and Chicago. We have focused on the upwardly mobile middle class who exemplify the consumption culture of rising middle class of post-liberalisation India, and also the successful professional upper middle class migrant living in the US.

1.7 Methodology

As we mentioned at the very outset the very nature of transnationalism involves more than one place and more than one nation. To truly capture the transnational space as one unified field in which the actors interact and
operate, it was important to study not only those who migrated, but also those who stayed back and who are transnationanlly connected. For this reason we have chosen to do a multi-sited ethnography – the two sites involved are Delhi and Chicago. The multi-sited framework expands the field of vision, Peggy Levitt would argue, it is perspective that has to be adopted for any transnational exploration. A detailed analysis and elaboration of the significance of multi-sited approach and my own reflexivity in this space is elaborated upon in the third chapter. The liminal position of being between places, having traversed the two cities of Delhi and Chicago in the last six years has offered me a vantage point to explore the transnational field. The perspective of multi-sited approach and method, along with an attempt to keep in background the political economy of global processes is what has informed us as a methodology.

1.8 Sources of Data

As we already mentioned our research project is an ethnographic account, a method best suited to capture the inter-subjective space of communities. The ethnographic field work was conducted for nearly two years, involving the two field sites of Delhi and Chicago. I spent equal amounts of time going aback and forth between these two cities, experiencing transnationalism at firsthand. The field work data relied largely on: 1) observations in the field settings of the families 2) open ended interviews, conducted personally with informants 3) videos of rituals taken by families themselves and 4) photographs of families, rituals etc. 5) Indian shopping areas as sites of all things Indian and an enclave representing Indian community space. The space is also visited as an ethnographic exercise and to assess availability of ethnic goods and services that indicate articulation of indianess/ethnicity or tradition. Secondary material such 6) websites
1.9 Chapterisation

Chapter 2 Understanding the Context and Key Concepts
We feel it necessary to clearly understand the context and socio-economic setting that forms the backdrop to the unfolding of intersecting interactions between the actors from abroad and home. Globalisation is the process and context in which our transnational agents are situated. It is useful therefore to clearly delineate the various arguments that follow the analysis of globalisation. This will help us to locate ourselves and indicate the perspective which informs us in our analysis of the middle class families and their consumption around rituals. We will also examine ideas about community, transnationalism, consumption, ritual, the Indian middle class and family.

Chapter 3 Studying Transnational Space: Review of Literature, Theoretical Framework and Methodology
The chapter will undertake a very exhaustive review of literature, which will help us locate the problem that we are addressing in a more pointed way. The chapter will also indicate some of the theoretical orientations that inform us in the research and analysis of our topic. There will be a discussion on the methodology that we will adopt; the suitability of the method of field work will be discussed.

Chapter 4 Sites of Investigation: The Transnationally Connected Indian Families in Delhi and Chicago
This chapter is essentially devoted to locating the upwardly mobile middle class professionals in the context of the socioeconomic and geographic landscape they inhabit. The chapter also discusses the nature of middleclass in
contemporary context and the problems articulating the notion of middle class. The forays in to fieldwork in Chicago and Delhi are taken up as well.

Chapter 5 The World at their Feet: The Transnationally Connected Indians in Delhi
In this chapter we will detail out and analyse the everyday life-worlds of the Indian families who live in Delhi but who are transnationally connected through various global flows and connections. The field data is analysed in three themes – the family, the market, and the media. These three themes are seen as intersecting social fields which inform and mediate the consumption choices patterns and articulation of identity.

Chapter 6 Indians in Chicago: Living America and Celebrating India
The previous chapter talked about the Indians in Delhi. In this chapter we discuss the social fields of Indians in Chicago. The details of our ethnographic work are laid out in similar themes of family, the market and the media but set in the context of the larger American society and the contexts of the geography of the place as well as in the interactive world of transnational connections with home and new technologies and the political economy of globalisation.

Chapter 7 Conclusions
As the title of the chapter indicates, in this chapter we hope to draw some conclusions in the way home and abroad intersect in a unified social field, implicating the lives of the immigrants as well as the ones who stay back. We will situate the institution of family in this context and examine the nature of family among the middle class Indians. The focus of our study is on the transnational nature of ritual. Hence ritual performances will be examined to see how they reveal various discursive notions of tradition, nationality and
various other identities. Additionally we will be arriving at some semblance of a concluding remark on the question that we have posed, that is whether the transnational Indians can be considered a community.