Chapter 3

Studying Transnational Space: Review of Literature, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Our research focus is on the transnational social field of not only those who migrate but those who stay behind. Thus we are exploring the social fields of the upwardly mobile migrant Indian in America, specifically Chicago and the mobile professional Indian who is exposed to transnational connections in Delhi.

So far, we have examined the literature specifically related to the transnational condition of the Indian diaspora. The writings are few and far between on this area. We are also going to examine the literature on Indian diaspora in general, in the hope that it will give us a sense of the diasporic situation at large. This chapter essentially focuses on the literature on the Indian diaspora and also the transnational Indian. In the course of examining the literature we will also isolate concepts/terms and perspectives that will be useful for our exploration of the transnational space of the Indian diaspora and subsequently outline the methodology best suited for this research endeavour.

3.1 The Indian Diaspora: A Review of Literature

The Indians who had migrated to various parts of the globe are not only vast in numbers but varied in their backgrounds, belonging to different religions, ethnicities, regions and classes. The socio-cultural background and the different contexts of their host countries make the literature on Indian diaspora
equally vast and varied. In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the writings on Indian diaspora from different disciplines and streams. The literary writings on the diasporic condition by authors, who themselves are often diasporic, are perhaps the most well known of writings on Indian diaspora. Historians, sociologist, economist, demographers and literary critics all have been studying Indian diaspora. Any comprehensive study of Indian diaspora will include a variety of themes and topics for analysis that can not be covered by any one particular discipline with its particular orientation. Therefore, it is useful to look at some of the major themes that have been explored.

An aspect we would like to bring to fore is that the writings and research on Indian diaspora, very often do not make a distinction between diaspora and transnational communities. Often the term ‘diaspora’ is used, generically, for all those migrants who are away from home, old or new, whether they have connections with home or not. For this reason we may have to examine the literature that looks at diasporic experience in general and possibly hope to glean some aspects that look at the transnational elements of Indian diaspora within this literature, before we come to the works that deal with the transnational space of Indian diaspora.

3.1.1 Demographic and Geographic Aspects

The 20th century saw huge movements of people across the globe. Many Western countries like Canada, US, UK and Australia have become favourite destinations for migration. Migration patterns and their significance have come under scrutiny as the immigrant communities have now started influencing the politics of their host countries and have also been exerting considerable influence in the home country.
During different periods in history the magnitude and pattern of migrations have depended on several factors, push and pull factors as it were. During the colonial time the imperialist policies and socio-economic conditions had a bearing on the nature, destination and magnitude of migration. Many scholars, historians and sociologists have traced these patterns of movement, not only to understand the migratory pattern itself from historical point of view, but to fully grasp the society and culture among the people of Indian origin, in settler colonies (Kondapi, 1951; Saha, 1970; Magru, 1987; Vertovec, 1992; Tinker, 1993; Gossine, 1994). Several scholars have attempted an overview of the migration trends of the Indian migrants in post colonial times that reveal the pattern of movement, mainly to rich Western countries and to metropolitan areas of these countries, these studies on post colonial migration are country specific, there are however, hardly any comparative studies (Parekh, 2003; Motwani, 1992; Tinker, 1993; Jayaram, 2004). All these studies do indicate that apart from the policies of the host countries which favoured migration the networks established by kith and kin greatly aided the migration to these countries.

3.1.2 Socio-cultural Aspects

An overall look at the literature on Indian diaspora reveals a recurrent theme that can be clubbed under a category that touches upon the socio-cultural aspects of the Indian who migrated. Many disciplinary perspectives have invariably tried to examine the aspects of migrant’s life in the host country – their coping mechanisms in strange places, the issue of assimilation, resistance to forces of assimilation and the various expressions of nostalgia and longing for home. The issue of identity and identity construction is another aspect that features strongly in the literature. The above mentioned aspects are
interrelated and intertwined; we will however make a heuristic separation of some of the main issues under the following categories.

**Cultural persistence and resistance:** In situation of marginalisation and political and economic subjugation, especially among the Indians who went as indentured labour, "a calculated withdrawal into their culture" (Lal, 2004:6) helped them survive the odds. It is the cultural practices that distinguished them from fellow labouring classes which were brought into the colonies by the British Empire. 'as early as 1870, the Royal Commission observed that the coolie's (Indian) possession of distinct culture is what distinguishes them from their Afro counterparts' (Jayaram, 2003:127). Studies of the Indians who went as labour to the British colonies of Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, Fiji, South Africa and elsewhere, invariably focus on the way they carried bits and pieces of cultural practices, which they practiced to separate themselves from others as a marker of their identity.

The fact that many of the émigrés were not from homogenous cultural backgrounds added to complex recollection of practices that connected diverse populations, hailing from different ethnicities, languages and religions. However, because of the forced mixing of people many of the differences and hierarchies that were part of their background receded enough in the background, and in turn made way for semblances of homogenised cultural practices that drew from the larger tradition of Hinduism (see Kuper, 1960; Klass, 1961, also Vertovec, 1994 and Van Der Veer, 1995). Writing about the emergence of unitary Hindu tradition among the Trinidadians, Jayaram says that it 'has its popular base in rituals rather in doctrines' (2003:128).
Migration and Identity: “We know of no people without names, no language or culture in which some manner of distinction between self and other, we and they are, not made. Self knowledge – always a construction, no matter how much it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others” (Calhoun, 1994:9-10). Preserving cultural practices in alien lands and difficult situations seems to be a natural existential necessity. And as many studies indicate, the older diasporas in particular, have retreated into little Indians as a survival tactic. In this process they also made sure their identity as ‘Indians’ is marked out vis-à-vis the other non Indian inhabitants of the settler colonies, whether it is countries of Africa, the Islands of Caribbean or Indian Ocean. The Indians distinguished themselves on many plains and gathered around such criteria as language, religion, custom and cuisine. Socialisation into aspect of culture and customs incorporated specific ethnic and regional practices and hybridised pan Hindu practices. So the intersecting circles of identity are evoked as according to the communities they are pitted against. In her book on India abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England, Sandhya Shukla (2003) says:

Indian diaspora is simultaneously a concept, a set of social formation. In allowing us to consider how migrant people negotiate life amid tremendous social, cultural and political change by building the “imagined communities” of nations, by creating identities and by expressing themselves as multiply constituted, diaspora invokes, always with qualification, way of life-community, culture, and society. The term diaspora also conveys an affective experience in a world of nations, through its proposition of global belonging as a means of self and group representation. Yet neither globality nor diaspora should be interpreted to mean the absence of location (Shukla, 2003:4).
The location and the situated context are important to understand the various identity expressions. Construction and expression of identities across the globe have been varied depending on the specific location and contexts of the area. The diasporic Indian community experience in South Africa would be different from the way identity expressions are articulated in Fiji. Among the Indians themselves the sub-divisions of language, caste, regionalism expresses themselves differently depending on the contexts. The literature on the specificities is too vast for summarisation without losing out the essential arguments. Therefore we can make some very general observations.

It has been generally argued by many scholars, to an extent that it is taken as understatement, that there is a general insularisation of old diaspora into retreats of “little India”, which created Indian communities based on recall, nostalgia, and hybridity, syncretism. It is observed that the variations of practices and subdivision had got coalesced into one homogenised culture to give shape to a larger entity, however the many identities are constantly under revision (Parekh, 2003; Vertovec, 1992; Van Der Veer, 1995). Continued connections with homeland has also helped preserve some aspects of Hinduism (Vertovec, 2000).

The social formation identity can be thought of as working between the place of origin, place of settlement, and a diasporic consciousness that shifts among the two towards new construction of subjectivity. Our main concern being the transnational space where home and abroad meet, it is useful at this point to examine literature that looks specifically at this transnational space.

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21 The term hybridity and syncretism have been popular in a number of schools of thought, in Postcolonial studies, the terms refer to, in a very general sense, to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation, and now of course the contact zones of global multicultural world. It takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic. Pidgin and Creole are linguistic examples.
3.2 Writings on Transnational Spaces

There are several writings, which do not necessarily involve studies of transnational space *per se*, but which nevertheless discuss all kinds and aspects of cross-border transnational connections and networks. Many of these writings have emerged from different fields – from international relations, political science, anthropology, sociology and economics, to name the major areas.

One of the earliest works, which attempt to capture cross-border and global activities among non-govermental groups and organisations is the edited volume by Joseph Nye’s (1971) *Transnational Relations and World Politics*. This volume emphasises the importance of global interaction, which looks at movement of money, people, objects, ideas. Since the publication of this volume there has been growing amount of literature concerning many aspects of transnational connections. They cover a wide range of transnational connections such as religious activities (Rudolph and Piscatori 1997), corporate executives, state bureaucrats and such other ‘transnational capitalist class’(Sklair,2001), occupational groups such as domestic workers (Anderson,2000) or sex workers (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998), worldwide terrorist groups (see Hoffman, 1999) etc. The list also includes growing work on virtual communities of cyberspace, which initially did not interest the academics. However, it has been argued that on-line networks and relationships do indeed constitute communities comparable to face-to-face ones (see Escobar 1996, Jordan 1999, Dutton 1999, Smith and Kollock 1999).

The survey of literature we have done so far refers to diasporic situation of Indian migrants in general context of their isolation, lack or of assimilation, cultural persistence, reproduction and issues of identity. None of them
however refer to specific transnational fields. We will examine the literature that refers to the transnational context in the following section.

3.2.1 Social Fields of Transnationally Connected Diaspora

Recognition of the transnational space is recent in the diaspora literature. However, much before the advent of terms such as transnationality/transnationalism etc, many academics in Britain, had recognised that the everyday life of the South Asian immigrants, that they were studying, were extending to their home country, though they were not necessarily treating these extended space in terms of social fields.

Several works in the early 1990s explored the theme of interconnections between migrants and their home countries – *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994a), *South Asians Overseas* (Clarke et al., 1990) and *Nation and Migration* (Van der Veer, 1995). Charsley and Shaw (2006; 331-332) in their writings capture the contributions as thus:

These volumes explored issues that remain of crucial importance in research on transnationalism ‘from below’. Elinor Kelly (1990) wrote of ‘transcontinental’ Gujarati families – a concept identical in content, if not terminology, to the more recent formulations of ‘transnational families’ (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002)”. Pnina Werbner’s (1990) and Katy Gardner’s work on Bangladeshi families of migrants to Britain provided insights from the other ‘end’ of migration, including the experience of ‘second generation’ British Bangladeshis of visits ‘back home’ (Gardner 1993 and 1995; Gardner and Shukur 1994), and the indigenous conceptions of place and power that motivate flows of goods and people between Britain and Bangladesh.
Most of these studies were undertaken to analyse the immigrant situation and life in Great Britain. A few studies in US talk about networks and connections among immigrants which are an integral part of immigrant life. The role of social networks has been an important feature of the literature in diaspora studies; For instance, in studies of ethnic business enclaves and ethnic niches. Ethnic niches emerge when particular ethnicities corner a particular kind of business like laundry services by Chinese, Koreans and other Asians, or convenient stores and motels by Indians and especially Gujarati Indians ...all the way to certain departments in civil services such as police and fire department in cities of US (Waters 1994; Doeringer & Moss, 1986; Bailey & Waldinger, 1991; Waldinger, 1996; Stepick, 1989). Enclaves are dense concentrations of immigrant or ethnic firms that employ a significant proportion of their co-ethnic labor force and develop a distinctive physical presence in urban space. Studies of New York’s Chinatown (Zhou, 1992), of Miami’s Little Havana (Portes 1987; Portes & Stepick 1993; Perez, 1992), and of Los Angeles’ Korea town (Light & Bonacich, 1988 and Nee et al. 1994), consistently highlight the role of community networks as a source of vital resources for these ethnic firms. Such resources include but are not limited to start-up capital; others are tips about business opportunities, access to markets, and a pliant and disciplined labour force. In this list of studies we did not come across any comprehensive studies, which deal with the Indian migrants and their ethnic enclaves and the role of social networks

Apart from the networks as avenues of mobility for the immigrants the mobility resulting from networks of remittance has equally been well chronicled. Remittances\textsuperscript{22} from abroad may be micro events but they have macro ramifications, not just for the people who receive them but for national

\textsuperscript{22} According to a newspaper report; India is the highest recipient of remittance from abroad with USD 27 billion being sent to the country during 2007 (Financial Express, October 23, 2008).
economies as well. It is not only individuals who have been receiving money but also organisations. Development organisations – NGOs have also been receiving money that has gone towards development of the home country (see Helweg, 1983; Thandi, 2006).

Transnational migration scholarship has also looked into the social life and the changes brought into institutions such as family, marriage and kinship and how these inform race, class, race and gender. Networks are used as social capital for upward mobility (Ballard, 2001; Fog Olvig, 2000; Gardner, 2006; Schmalzbauer, 2004) and they also reveal exploitative gender relations, where brides who do not have access to any kind of employment are caught up in obligatory tightly knit community networks. Sometimes asymmetrical gender relations are reinforced even more than in home country to protect women from what is perceived as immoral culture of the West (Alumkal, 1995; Caglar, 1995; Espiritu, 1992). On the other hand, working in host countries has proved to be empowering for women (Gallo, 2005). The exploitative aspect of networks has class dimensions as well; kin members who come from less advantageous class backgrounds are exploitatively used as cheap labour, among other things (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Chamberlain, 2002). For the ones who receive the remittances as in the case of women in Kerala, whose husbands are sojourners, mostly in the Gulf region; remittances have increased women’s decision-making powers (Zachariah and Rajan, 2001).

Networking through marriage in the Indian context has obvious implications for mobility and also in reinforcing hierarchies. “U. Kalpagam’s paper shows how Tamil Brahman families seek to enhance their status in their own community and bank social capital for the future by arranging the marriages of their children with partners studying or working in North America. They call it America varan, the American boon/marriage alliance” (Palriwala and
For the women who migrate through marriage the situation can be liberating as it is for the Dominican women, who do not want to go back home as they fear loss of their new found freedom and so see no reason to send remittances, home but instead spend money on making a home in the US (Curran and Saguay, 2001). 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).

Meenakshi Thapan’s book *Transnational Migration and Politics of Identity* is an important contribution to the literature on transnational migration and the implication migration has for identity. “The volume attempts to examine and highlight the complexities that women encounter in the process of migration, emphasising not merely the constraints women experience, but also highlighting the strategies of resistance, rebellion and collective organisation they deploy in their everyday lives. It seeks to break out of the limited understanding of Asian Women as passive actors in migration, as dependents and as victims of suppression and exploitation in spatial and locational settings that view them in ethnic and racial terms” (2005:12). The volume is important not only for addressing gender but for providing a very nuanced reading of the complexities; of race, nation, state, family, home etc.,

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23 *The Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 2005; 12; 5 is devoted to marriage and migration, capturing the complex interlocking nature of mobility, migration and marriage strategies. Gallo has a case study of Syrian Christian women who migrate to Italy in 1960-70s with the intention of becoming *muns, as their families are unable to secure them an alliance. But these women eventually found employment, and also got married to non *Malyalis. Materially comfortable they are rehabilitated in their families, for they are also source of further sponsorship and migration. Xiang 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).
involved in transnational migration. Of particular significance, owing to its focus on US, is Rayprol’s article on the changing nature of identity among generations of Indian immigrants. Her pointer that “the process of constructing diasporic identities cannot be generalised across categories of class, race/ caste, gender and generation” was pertinent to our topic of exploration (2002:130).

Remittances and transnational networks have implications for generational relations and care of the elderly. The gap and distance between parents and their migrant children is now increasingly closed by frequent travels on the part of parents from the home country, constant communication through various channels and so on. Mazzucato (2007a) shows how migration changes intergenerational relations between parents in Ghana and their migrant children by affecting the ways in which elderly care is provided or not provided24. There are no full-fledged studies of such nature with regards to Indian diaspora. Supriya Singh (2006) brings out 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 relative status enjoyed by immigrants in their host countries has definite implications on how they want to articulate various expressions of identity. Home and host country mobility status may not be always in synch. A manual worker from rural India may enjoy a differential status in US or UK or to what he/she may experience in India. ‘Migrants have to make sense of two, often conflicting socioeconomic and status ladder, and to locate themselves

24 There are an increasing number of luxurious old-age homes being constructed in different parts of India. A good part of the money for these facilities is coming from Indians abroad. As this newspaper article reveals “A swanky old-age home, being constructed on the outskirts of the city (Ahmedabad), will be ready in about a year, Several NRIs whose parents don’t want to join them abroad, had evinced keen interest in the project as they feel the elders would be better cared for in the old-age home” (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/).
somewhere within them using measurements that reflect the multiple places
where they live’ (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Raj, 2003; Roth, 2006; Smith,
2006). Some recent work has shown how first and second generation migrants
help reinvent religion to help counter their marginalisation and blocked
mobility in host countries. Kamat and Mathew (2003) describe US Hindus
who join fundamentalist groups and how the multiculturalist discourse in
place in the United States which reifies neglected minorities actually
encourage a Hindu awareness of this kind. Dhooleka Raj (2000) documents a
similar process for young Hindus in Great Britain who, in this case use
religion to differentiate themselves from Muslims and other ‘Asians’ ” (Levitt,
2007).

Being identified in a particular way, at an everyday level involves adoption of
several practices from the cornucopia of cultural practices, which are
imaginatively assembled or reinvented depending on situation. Thus, Indians
often identify themselves and, marking themselves from others by following
Indian cuisine, dress, customs and traditions. Sometimes it is very difficult to
separate cultural practices from ‘religious’ ones. Some of these traditions are
tied up with religion, for instance rituals have religious aspect to them. By
observing rituals that seems an affirmation of tradition, and willy-nilly the
religion. The longing for home, nostalgia and the idea of being Indian often
makes people take to religion. Many (Rajgopal, 1997; Matthew and Prashad,
2000) for example hold the NRI Indian responsible for the rise in Hindu
fundamentalist activity in India. According to Kapur (2003), however, there
is no substantial evidence to support such claim.

Another expression of the longing for home and engagement with the
homeland, other than religious is the visual culture. According to Sujata
Moorti; “the field of visual culture makes possible another form of
identification with the homeland. The transnational circuits of popular culture permit immigrants to construct a community of sentiment that is articulated in the domestic idiom, based on shared affiliations and identifications” (Moorti 2003:356). Moorti analyses visual media of cinema made by Indians in North America, “Tapping into the warehouse of cultural images that western and Indian popular culture have on offer, the diasporic community has produced a visual grammar that seeks to capture the dislocation, disruption and ambivalence that characterizes their lives” (ibid). This capturing of nostalgia, she says, is made through a “diasporic optic”. “The diasporic optic captures visually this reflective nostalgia; it looks constantly at two or more different worlds, and moves in two different directions at once. It 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” (ibid).

The Bollywood film on the other hand moved away from the days when the ‘foreign returned Indian was as good as an alien, affected by immoral West’ to engagement with the diaspora. However conservative the agenda (see

25 As Director Govind Nilhani reflecting on the change of diasporic characters in a magazine interview put it: “The camera would start from those new shoes and tilt up, the trousers, the face with the cigarette hanging from the mouth. The foreign-returned had an affected manner; the girl had bobbed hair, a mini skirt. They had lost their Indianness and become alien (India Today, 4 August 1997).

26 Patricia Uberoi (1998) analyses two popular films of mid 1990 – Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ) and Pardes – that “thematis the problems of transnational location in respect of courtship and marriage. The two films share a conservative agenda on the family, but differ in their assessment of the possibility of retaining Indian identity in diaspora. DDLJ proposes that Indian family values are portable assets, while Pardes suggests that the loss of cultural identity can be postponed but ultimately not avoided. These discrepant solutions mark out Indian popular cinema as an important site for engagement with the problems resulting from middle-class diaspora, and for articulation of Indian identity in a globalised world” (1998:305).
Uberoi, 1998), Bollywood cinema has expanded its themes and locale to territories outside India. Bollywood films of the nineties with diasporic interests have developed the theme of migrancy and settlement in Hindi cinema. This extension of the Indian community is further expanded in subsequent films where the Indianess is a tolerant version which intersects with the lives of Indian diaspora. Aswin Punathambekar says:

In exploring and cautiously legitimizing the cultural space of Indian life in the diaspora, films like Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (K3G) renders the diaspora’s version of Indianness less transgressive and/or impure (as in a long line of movies from Purab Aur Paschim to Pardes) and more of an acceptable variant of Indianness... K3G articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the diaspora to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India’s tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India’s navigation of this space (2003:152).

An aspect that has received little attention is the emigrants returning home. In the past emigrants have returned during troubled times in the host countries, which happened in West Asia. Lately there been reports that many NRIs once considered non-returning Indians are returning back to India. The reverse

27 “Nineties’ film plots spanned several cities across several continents with diasporic characters taking centre stage. Film sets and costumes began to illustrate a look and feel of urban centres (openly displaying the brand names of Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, Nike...) in which the characters could be in middle-class India or the urban diaspora of the West thereby opening up affinities with audiences across the globe” (Dudrah, 2002:29).

28 Several newspapers feature articles and news stories about the returning NRIs. This quote is from the online edition of The Telegraph, “While no statistics available on how many NRIs are returning, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a broad trend. A major logistics company’s spokesperson in Mumbai mentioned that almost every week it helps relocate NRIs to the Hiranandani Gardens at Powai in Mumbai, the preferred residential place of many NRIs. Hiranandani is a self-contained complex and comes equipped with a shopping plaza,
migration has not been really looked into. The returning NRIs bring with them their own lifestyles, expectations. Their lives intersect with those at home and these crisscrossing influences, of home and abroad, are the central essence of transnational space that we have been talking about, which is well worth investigating.

3.3 Theoretical Orientations and Some Useful Concepts

Till recently migrant experience in the world has been studies in a largely discrete phenomena not relating it to global process of interconnections and hypereality of the webworld. Scholars of late have noted the fluidity of migrant experience and the cross border everyday lives they live, the lead towards pointing out these social fields were taken by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christian Blanc-Szanton. They point towards a need to adopt a transnational perspective for a study of migrant experiences in global world. The premises of these perspective can be put as:

- Bounded social science concepts such as tribe, ethnic group, nation, society or culture can limit the ability of researcher to first perceive and then analyse, the phenomena of transnationalism;
- The development of transnational migrant experience is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analysed within the world context;
- Transnationalism is grounded in daily lives, activities and social relationship of migrants;
- Transnational migrants, although predominantly workers, live a complex existence that forces them to confront, draw upon, and rework different identity constructs – national, ethnic and racial

restaurants, state-of-the-art hospitals, an ecotel hotel and a school. (The Telegraph, September 18, 2005).
• The fluid and complex existence of transnational migrants compels us to reconceptualise the categories of nationalism, ethnicity and race, theoretical work that can contribute to reformulating our understanding of culture, class and society and;

• Transmigrants deal with and confront a number of hegemonic contexts both global and national. These hegemonic contexts have an impact on the transmigrants' consciousness, but at the same time transmigrants reshape these contexts by their interaction and resistance.

The transnational perspective clearly is the most appropriate approach to adopt given what we wanted to examine in the context of transnational global Indian community that is located in Delhi and in Chicago. We certainly need a perspective that goes beyond the traditional entities of nation and bounded culture and that allows an examination of social fields that cross boundaries. The transnational perspective allows and compels us to examine the everyday, micro lived experiences of migrants. Since our focus is on the micro family events of rituals and the relationships between family members and to the larger world and various articulations such as class, caste, ethnicity that are expressed in such occasions. This is the perspective we had adopted, keeping in mind the main tenets that we outlined above.

Additionally, it is useful to look at some concepts that gave us an orientation and conceptual tools for examining the transnational social fields of the Indian families. The choice of these terms for discussion has been motivated by what we thought is pertinent to our research. Steven Vertovec (2003) and Peggy Levitt (2004, 2007) have elaborated on these terms in their respective writings. We follow them in identifying these concepts as being useful to any study of transnational space.
3.3.1 Social network

J. A. Barnes was perhaps the first to employ social network\textsuperscript{29} to study the Norwegian fishing community. Barnes described the idea of network analysis as investigating how the 'configuration of cross-cutting interpersonal bonds is in some unspecified way causally connected with the actions of these persons and with the social institutions of their society' (in Mitchell 1974: 282). This conception of social networks is akin to structural functionalist approach and method. And similarly social network approach is a perspective and a paradigm to study interconnection among individuals and groups and larger societal structures. Networks are both channels for mobility and for societal constraints. The network channels act as conduits of flow of material and non-material resources (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). The approach looks at each individual as a node linked to others to form network. The social network analysis by not treating individuals as discrete individuals is able to look at the structure of ties. The social network analysis does not assume that the individuals are the building blocks of society but instead analyses in what way the individuals are tied to others and to structures of society.

\textsuperscript{29} George Simmel, at the turn of the century was the first one to think directly in terms social network. His essays pointed to the nature of network size on interaction and to the likelihood of interaction in ramified, loosely-knit networks rather than groups (Simmel, 1908/1971). In 1940, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's presidential address to British anthropologists urged the systematic study of networks. However, it took about 15 years before this call was followed-up systematically.

Social network analysis developed with the kinship studies of Elizabeth Bott in England in the 1950s and the 1950s-1960s urbanization studies of the University of Manchester group of anthropologists (centered around Max Gluckman and later J. Clyde Mitchell) investigating community networks in southern Africa, India and the United Kingdom. Concomitantly, British anthropologist S.F. Nadel codified a theory of social structure that was influential in later network analysis (www.wikepedia.org/wiki/Social_network).
Ulf Hannerz (1980:181) has suggested that social network analysis probably constitutes the most extensive and widely applicable framework we have for the study of social relations. In the contexts of a globally connected world, with its interconnecting technologies, the term network has become ever more useful. According to Manuel Castells, the leading social theorist on contemporary changes in global world, “networks constitute the new social morphology of our society, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in process of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking forms of social organisation has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion through the entire social structure” (Castells, 2000:500).

Network analysis provides a vocabulary and terms that help assess various aspects of networks and interactions. The concepts indicate the actual morphology as well as interactional behaviour, these are:

- **Size;** number of nodes,
- **frequency;** of contact,
- **density;** the number of connections between nodes or the ‘extent to which everyone of ego’s contacts know each other’ (Mitchell 1969: 15),
- **intensity/strength of ties;** this would indicate the emotional involvement, relative frequency duration of contact and willingness and involvement and commitment to obligations that are part of the interactions and relationships.
- **Multiplexity;** the existence of two or more types of relations linking actors or the degree to which relations between participants include
overlapping institutional spheres. (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994:1448),

Content; content might include economic exchange, kinship obligation, religious cooperation, friendship and gossip. Mitchell consistently emphasised that ‘the determination of the content involves knowing what meaning the actors in any situation are attributing to the cues, signs and symbols being presented in the interaction’ (ibid.: 296) and that this calls ideally for ethnographic research (see Mitchell 1966, 1969, 1987).

Network analysis has been adopted by many social-scientists to study large scale societies where ties and networks among people are not self-evident. The network analysis was also supposed to be an improvement over structural functionalist analysis of small scale societies. According to Mitchell, “social networks ...were seen as an elaboration of basic structural-functional notions which could provide an explanation of how norm consensus and norm directed behavior was achieved – points which were inadequately handled in structural-functional treatments” (ibid:285).

As we can see, from our preceding discussion about network analysis, that is highly suited to study interactions in globally interconnected and networked society. The network analysis has been hugely popular in studies involving transnational spaces (Meyer, 2002).

While network analysis is very popular with writings on transnationalism, it has many critics. “It is often pointed out that the structure of a network in itself says very little about the qualitative nature of relationships comprising it— not least concerning the exercise of power (cf. Doreen Massey 1993, 1999, Dicken et al. 2001). Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) are critical of the
problems that the social networks perspective has with questions of cultural content and individual agency (cf. Hannerz 1992). Too often, Emirbayer and Goodwin suggest, network analysis can tend to reify social relationships and to suggest a kind of structural determinism” (Vertovec, 2001:10).

Notwithstanding the formal tendency in network analysis, we feel it is very useful concept to understand the networks that operate in the Indian family situation that we explored. What kind of networks, how are they mediated by global technologies, in what way the networks among individuals and global institutions compel and impel the way identities are articulated and how traditions are observed are very much a part of our analysis.

Another approach which goes beyond and yet is concomitant to network analysis is the one which employs the term ‘social capital’, in trying to understand the content and impact of networks.

3.3.2 Social Capital

Social capital is another key term that has many variants and usages. There is no set and commonly agreed upon definition of social capital and the particular definition adopted by a study will depend on the discipline and level of investigation (Robinson et al. 2002). The modern usage of the term is attributed to three key authors-Coleman, Bourdieu and Putnam, with many authors contributing to the multi-disciplinary theory.

Bourdieu looks at social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). On the other hand, the
acquisition of social capital requires deliberate investment of both economic and cultural resources. Though Bourdieu insists that the outcomes of possession of social or cultural capital are reducible to economic capital, the processes that bring about these alternative forms are not. They each possess their own dynamics, and, relative to economic exchange, they are characterised by less transparency and more uncertainty. For example, transactions involving social capital tend to be characterised by unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons, and the possible violation of reciprocity expectations. But, by their very lack of clarity, these transactions can help disguise what otherwise would be plain market exchanges (Portes, 1998:4).

According to Coleman 'Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure' (Coleman 1990:302). For Putnam, social capital signifies; 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1995: 67).

Alejandro Portes in his article Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology gives detailed analysis some of the prime conceptions of social capital in social science literature. In this article he argues that despite differences in conception “the consensus is growing in the literature that social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage (Portes, 1998:7).
Alejandro Portes (1998) used the term social capital to understand how through networks people increase their capacity to increase resource and command power. He says it can provide privileged access to resources or restrict individual freedoms by controlling behaviour. It is based on collective expectations affecting an individual's behaviour (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), including general shared values, normative reciprocity and 'enforceable trust' – or the mode by which loyalty and morality is monitored and safeguarded within a social network. Social capital is maintained, for example, by visits, communication by post or telephone, marriage, participation in events and membership in associations. There is a certain amount of debate as to what degree, and how, social capital is convertible to other forms of capital, namely financial and human.

Migration among the Indian community has been a source of upward mobility and source of furthering the social capital. Social capital involves obligations, exchanges, gift giving and showing of wealth all of which is exemplified in the way rituals are observed. Therefore the concept is useful for this reason. Another concept that is very much related to social capita and network is the concept of embeddedness which captures the nuanced contexts and the power positions of the interactions and the outcomes of the interactions.

3.3.3 Embeddedness

The concept of embeddedness was introduced by Karl Polanyi (1944) to bring forth the interconnections between the economic activity with other social and cultural institutions. The term has become a crucial one in immigration studies where explanations are being sought to explain the success of immigrants in their host countries. Granovetter (1985, 1992) has emphasized how, essentially like all actions, economic action is socially situated and cannot be
explained wholly by individual motives. Such actions are not simply carried out by atomized actors but are embedded in ongoing networks of personal relationships. "‘Embeddedness’", he (1992: 25) says, ‘refers to the fact that economic action and outcomes, like all social action and outcomes, are affected by actors’ dyadic relations and by the structure of the overall network of relationships’ (ibid: 33) Portes develops Granovetter’s ideas by describing two kinds of embeddedness. The first, relational embeddedness, involves actors’ personal relations with one another, including norms, sanctions, expectations and reciprocity. The second, structural embeddedness, refers to different scales of social relationship in which many others take part beyond those actually involved in an economic transaction. Specific exchanges of an actor can be identified with respect to either or both kinds of embeddedness in order to interpret relevant sets of conditioning factors.

“The embedded social networks view is relevant, for instance, to Doreen Massey’s (1993, 1999) notion of ‘power-geometry’ whereby social relations are viewed as geographic and networked at a variety of scales from household to the international arena. The power individuals hold relate to how they are variously embedded in networks of relations found at these various scales. It is highly significant, too, for transnational studies since border-crossing social networks entail multiple forms of embeddedness that are not easily reconciled” (Vertovec 2001:2). The multiple forms of embeddedness that cover many areas, brings us to another crucial concept –‘social fields’. The concept of social fields is useful for trying to understand the space inhabited by actors, especially actors whose fields of embeddedness cut across boundaries of nation and distance.

The concept of emebeddness truly places the agent in his/her context. This is important to understand that the actors’ agency is drawn from the structural
and social context of her/his field. What constitutes an Indian may signify
different things to different people depending on the location and context in
which the person is located. For a diasporic professional living in the suburb
of Chicago being Indian may mean creating boundaries, to an extent, to
separate herself/himself from fellow inhabitants of the space and from other
Americans; whereas it would mean a different thing for a young professional
living in Delhi and earning an American salary. Expressions of identity would
be different too for the first generation Indian American to the second
generation Indian as their situated embedded context would be different in
subtle nuances. The concept is useful for a comprehensive analysis of social
fields that we had explored.

3.3.4 Social fields

Scholars studying migrants have increasingly recognised that many migrants
and their descendents remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to
the home. And their kin at home in return are as influenced by the ongoing
ties that they have with their relatives who have migrated. It is argued that to
understand these transnational connections one has to examine these
connections empirically. Peggy Levitt argues that “our analytical must
necessarily broaden and deepen because migrants are embedded in multi-
layered, multi-sited transnational social fields encompassing those who move
and those who stay behind” (Levitt, 2004:596)

To be able to fully capture the interconnected fields that cut across boundaries
Peggy Levitt proposes that we employ social field as a concept to study
transnational spaces. Levitt and Schiller draw on the concept of social field
that was proposed by Bourdieu and the Manchester school of anthropology.
“Bourdieu used the concept of social field to call attention to the ways in
which social relations are structured by power. The boundaries of the field are fluid and the field itself is created by participants who are joined in a struggle for social position (Jenkins, 1992:86 quoted in Levitt: Ibid). The Manchester School ‘recognised that the migrants that they studied belonged to tribal-rural localities and colonial-industrial cities at the same time. Migrant networks stretching between these two sites were viewed as constituting a single social field created by a network of networks.

By conceptualising transnational social fields as transcending the boundaries of nation states, Levitt says, we are acknowledging that every day lives are affected by more than one state, and also by many fields -- such as legal systems, religious systems, cultural and so on... in more than one nation.

Having outlined these concepts and perspectives which have been used by large number of scholars in the study of migration, particularly migrants who maintained networks back home we will now talk of the best method suitable to study the transnational social fields of the families situated in Delhi and in Chicago.

3.4 Studying Transnational Social Field: Methodological Issues

The first question that strikes us is how does one capture the collective imagination of people whose range of practices are dispersed across space? Giddens (1991) argues that under conditions of globalisation social relations are disembedded from the local and can operate in contexts where space no longer matters because shared systems of symbols and knowledge circulate globally. How does one capture this disjuncture? As we gleaned from our exhaustive literature that there is general consensus that diasporic experience can no longer be studies solely from a host country perspective.
Levitt, as we already mentioned, is of the opinion that studying transnational social field requires methodological shifts. "The new insights gleaned from studying migration through transnational lens – namely, the need to include non-migrants as well as migrants, consider the multi sites and levels of transnational social fields beyond just sending and receiving country, rethink assumptions about belonging...demand methodological shifts" (Levitt, 2007:29). Glick Schiller (2003) argue that 'we need to move beyond discrete comparisons between nation states containers and be willing to conceptualise space as bounded in the ways people living in them actually perceive them'.

Peggy Levitt says, in the context of studying transnational religion, "I propose the studies of transnational religion focus on the everyday, lived practices of migrant religion in at least two locations. They should explore...concrete expressions of religious beliefs, practices. This context specific approach is especially important in studies of religious tradition not characterized by a unitary set of beliefs" (Levitt, 2001:8).

George Marcus recommends multi-sited ethnography and says:

To examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffused time-space" that “cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused upon a single site of intensive investigation. It develops instead a strategy or research design that...takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity. Just as it investigates and ethnographically constructs the life worlds of variously situated subjects it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the association and connection among sites that it posits (1995:95).
The flows as we mentioned earlier, include the people, images, ideas and commodities. And among the mapping strategies enumerated by Marcus, one way to study these flows would be to literally follow things, people and ideas. He gives an account of some these studies\(^{30}\), which track things, people and thoughts/metaphors. To have a sense of what researchers are undertaking, in mapping transnational flows, we lay them down as brief synoptic versions.

Following the people is one of the strategies that have been adopted by recent ethnographic understanding on transnational communities and diasporic world. Roger Rouse (1991) follows, for instance his Mexican subjects across borders and sites in the conventional mode of migration studies. The other has been to follow things. In anthropology Mintz’s cultural history of sugar is a fine example (Mintz, 1985). Appadurai in his introduction to his collection *The Social Life of Things* traces shifting contours of commodities as they circulate through different contexts. As for flow of the metaphor or thought, Emily Martin’s *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* is considered an appropriate example to study the different ways of thinking. Martin’s interest has been to trace the way people thought about body immunity—in mass media and ‘in the street’.

For many, in transnational studies, not only are there circulation of goods or flows, which connotes fluidity of spatial locations, but also networks among organisations, institutions and individual. Gille and Riain point out that there is a danger of reification of both the flows and networks concepts among transnational studies if we do not locate them to a geographical place. They write:

\(^{30}\) A more detailed account of various studies undertaken in the recent past that trace transnational flows are reviewed by Marcus in his article *Ethnography in/of the World System: the Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography* (Marcus1995) Also see, Gille and Riain (2002).
For all their differences, each of these approaches disconnects the social from any particular place – seeing contemporary social relations as characteristically stretching across places. Such approaches tend to reify these networks, flows, and other mobilities (Urry 2000) as themselves defining society. Despite recognizing that networks can be exclusionary, these approaches provide little analysis of power relations within networks and therefore find it difficult to explain reproduction and change in networks. Such explanations require that place-based resources and processes be included in the analysis. Furthermore, these approaches neglect the agency of actors and their sense-making activities as forces in shaping the flows themselves (2001:275).

To fully situate actors’ meanings in the context of their activities (The activity being in our case the life-cycle rituals), we need to locate our actors in actual places. The locations are best studied ethnographically for “ethnography is an especially suitable methodology with which to investigate social structures that are constituted across multiple scales and sites. Even the most sophisticated statistical methods tend to rely on a nested hierarchy of scales and units of analysis, whereas ethnography can strategically locate itself at critical points of intersection of scales and units of analysis, and can directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales” (ibid;279).

Our conclusion at this point is that to fully understand actors’ situatedness and embeddness in network of trans-border relations one needs to extend the idea of social field to sites outside the borders of nation states. And the method best suited to capture the micro instances of macro processes such as transnationalism is to study at multi-locations. The choice of field site, I must
admit here, stems largely from my own location and experience of the two cities -- Delhi and Chicago. While there were academic concerns to the choice of the topic for investigation, I do believe to some extent, being in the thick of the transnational world propelled me to further my curiosity and answer the questions I had in mind. Therefore I would like to briefly focus on the self reflexivity involved in the ethnographic project on hand and how locations of self had a bearing on the choice of field site and the loci of investigation, which is the upwardly mobile professionals in Delhi and Chicago.

3.5 Location of the Self

Recent research has brought to the forefront the limitations and "partial truths" produced by the methodologies that are employed in the "field." The ethnographer has been displaced from the position of detached observer and attention has increasingly been drawn to questions regarding the positionality of the researcher, practices of ethnographic writing and the politics of such representation. In the 1980s and 90s, several scholars have pointed out the above mentioned issues - Marcus and Fisher (1886) and Renato Rosaldo (1989), Ruth Behar (1996), and Dorinne Kondo (1995). This critique took some to take an extreme stand where the possibility of objectivity within ethnography was doubted and where every ethnographic endeavor became an interpretation. At this point we don't want to go into the debates that ensued following the early critiques on issues of ethnography. What we would like to state here is the value of placing the researcher's own positionality in the present exploration. In the following section, I will briefly outline my own position in the research endeavour, and explain the advantageous position that made me undertake this research. I was made aware of larger influences... of far off places and people when I experienced it, close at hand.
I was stunned with the discovery that in my family, which was known to shun elaborate rituals of any kind, had a wedding celebration that lasted three days. My parents were almost anti-ritualitic, in the tradition of self-conscious Dalits who were critical of everything seemingly Brahmanical. My father is an atheist, the only concession he would make is towards Buddhism, for its anti-ritualistic roots and philosophy. This wedding ceremony of mine was more than elaborate by many standards, (replete with ceremonies that were ‘authentic’ but little known) and especially in the light of where my parents came from. I was getting married to a ‘NRI boy’ from a Tamilian Brahmin social background. The groom’s family seemed very traditional. And so the performances of the authentic and some Vaishnavaite31 practices were for the benefit of the ‘traditional Iyer family’ that I was getting married into. A stance very strongly taken by the daughter in-law of the family (my brother’s wife) was that “we must meet their expectations”, no one was clear what the expectations were though, since the groom’s family never spelled out any expectations or demands. What was implicated is that as wife givers, my parents wanted to leave no stone unturned, to secure their daughter’s well being, in the eventuality of her moving into an affinal family32. What was also interesting to me was that my sister in-law (daughter in-law for my parents) who belonged to Vaishnavite Brahmin family took it upon herself to be the master of ceremonies, as others in the family, being mostly non ritualistic and from Dalit background however Vaishnavite in their origins, (I belong to community called ‘mala dasulu’ who pride themselves as being part of the

31 My family belongs to a Dalit caste called mala dasulu. The traditional occupation of the dasu community is singing and religious performances, they are the priests for the many dalit communities. The dasu community likes to distinguish themselves by recalling their ancestry and association with the vashnavite cult of Ramanujam. Like all castes in India, today they generally believe in prestigious origins (see Gupta, 2002).

32 The bride was, whenever the occasion arose, reprimanded to leave her single-person-hostel-bred secular -feminist ideas and to blend into a traditional Iyer family: a family who respected traditions. Any protest by the bride (that is me) to cut down on number of ceremonies on the plea that it cost money if anything, was seen as sign of immaturity and worse defiance that is an antithesis of a bridal posture of willingness to adapt to husband’s family disposition.
Aalawar tradition of the Ramanujam’s Bhakti cult) were little aware of the rituals. The rituals were to be ‘properly done’, not diluted and there were to be no short-cuts. It seemed to me that it was important to say to the audience that we were a cultured family besides being reasonably well off, as in being part of a mobile middle class. The daughter in-law of the house, hailing as she is from ‘background of traditions and ceremonies’, played the role of a cultural bearer. Yet again the women take on this role of preserving and carrying on tradition and it does not matter whether their marriage is pratiloma – hypogamic or hypergamic. Family politics aside, what struck me was the way the wedding ceremony became a site of contestation and articulation of identity, tradition/ authenticity, mobility and several reference points for the different actors.

My residence in the US, subsequent to my marriage and my interactions with Indians in Chicago for several years, has raised my curiosity not just about the rituals becoming sites of articulation but I was made aware what it is to be Indian in US. Strangely not by white America but more so by my husband’s extended kin, several of whom reside in the US.

We (My husband and I) decided to move back to India in 2003, after nearly three year stint in Chicago, but in the last three years I have been going back and forth between Chicago and Delhi. My trips last long enough, over six months period, either at Chicago or Delhi, to make me feel at home and out of depth at the same time. Traditionally, ethnographers ‘left home’ to discover the ‘other’. In my case the other was what was across the border. This, despite the fact that technically home is India and Delhi for me. But being an immigrant to Delhi, I never really looked at the city as home. So there was always the outsider in me experiencing and examining what was seemingly a familiar terrain. And with Chicago what used to be unfamiliar and strange
became familiar enough for a certain level of comfort. After a point of time, in both the places I felt I was at the threshold, having enough distance to be able to look at things before they became too familiar. At the same time there was enough familiarity to be able to understand the nuanced embeddedness of the situations, events and actors. Thus, being a literal participant observer, between and betwixt places and time, a state of 'liminality' as it were puts me in the vantage position for an ethnographic study. This advantageous position that I have vis-à-vis Delhi and Chicago – of familiarity and strangeness – makes these two cities my natural choice.

In the chapter to follow, I will expand on these field sites, that I was at once familiar with and distanced. We will be placing the families that we interviewed and interacted over a period of two years in the embedded socioeconomic contexts of these two fields.

33 Victor Turner (1967, 1969, and 1974) used the term liminality in the context of his study of the Ndembe religion. In exploring rituals he uses the word liminality to denote 'the transitional state between two phases, individuals were "betwixt and between": they did not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into that society. Liminality is a limbo, an ambiguous period characterized by humility, seclusion, tests, sexual ambiguity, and communitas. 'Communitas' is defined as an unstructured community where all members are equal.'