Chapter 4

Sites of Investigation: The Transnationally Connected Indian Families in Delhi and Chicago

4.1 Recapitulating the Main Arguments

At the cost of repeating ourselves, we would like to recapitulate and reiterate some pertinent points from our previous chapters. One overriding aspect of transnational connections in a global era is that the ‘migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’. These multi-stranded social connections have been brought to fore as early as 1994 by Basch et al (Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc Szanton, 1994:6). Since then scholars have examined this aspect of diasporic experience and migrant transnational connections. The simultaneous embeddedness of migrants is another aspect that is increasingly being brought under focus in scholarship of transnationalism. “These arenas are multilayered and multisited occupied by both migrants and non-migrants, because the flow of people, money, and social remittances (ideas, norms, practices and identities) within these spaces is so dense, thick and widespread that non-immigrants lives are also transformed, even though they do not move.” (Levitt, 2007:7, see 2001 also).

A concomitant observation that we made from this above conclusion is that to fully capture this transnational social field, which implicates the migrant as
well as the non migrant, we need to examine and analyse this field empirically. We also arrived at the inference that ethnographic investigation of the embedded contexts of the transnational agents is by far the most suitable method of empirical investigation. The field based ethnography is important, especially since we found that many studies do not take into account the sense making aspect of agents who are involved in this transnational space. Since the social fields of migrants and those who stay back cover more than one geographical location, we have decided to capture the multi-stranded relations by adopting a multi-sited ethnography. As mentioned, this essentially involves a field based investigation in more than one place, in our case two sites – Delhi and Chicago – that are nodes of an interconnected world.

To capture what transnational means and the implications of this for the people involved, we decided to consider activities and relationships within households or families. As we found out, 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’.

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. The practice of life-cycle rituals involves relationships and issues of culture, tradition, ethnicity, gender and class/status. Rituals, as we have already mentioned in our previous chapter, 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 and in a transnational setting it gains added significance. 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. Weddings, for instance, have become a multi-crore business that operates transnationally with locations and operations wherever the Indian diaspora is concentrated. Such transnational business could also be carried through online, making them reach out to audiences that are not restricted to a region or locale. The media-mediated images and lifestyle channels, advertising etc, all contribute to fuelling the culture industry.

With businesses getting interested in selling culture, it is natural that they look to expand their market. Globalisation has made it possible, through new technologies of transportation and telecommunications, for images, ideas, practices and goods to transport, to far off places. For instance, these days with all the ritual and religious paraphernalia being made available, be it specialty articles such as fresh mango leaves, havan mixes, specialised food for ritual purposes, priests etc in a city like Chicago, it is possible that supply feeds the desire to articulate expressions of culture and identity. These rituals and acts of traditional practices could not easily lend themselves to performance because of non-availability of things that went into such acts. The significance of expanding markets makes it ever more pertinent to understand how consumption reveals aspects of self and society.

India has embraced the new economic polices in early 1990s in a truncated manner, but over a period of time one can say that liberal and globalising forces have come to say. The role of liberalisation of economy in aiding the
growth of middle class has been well debated and documented (see Deshpande 1998; Kulkarni 1993; Lakha 1999, Fernandes, 2006). Any mobile class wants to articulate its mobility and acquisition of status by relational distance and exclusivity through markers which indicate status. Lifestyles and consumption exemplify this aspect.

The very noticeable consumptiveness of the mobile middle class of globalised India is being scrutinised by the academics. With markets opening up or with liberalisation of economy the markets are flooded with goods and images that spell good life, a far cry from the pre-liberalised India. Along with the invasion of goods from international houses there is rise in the advertising industry who create and funnel the desires of the rising aspirers, seen in the upwardly mobile middle class especially. “The AP Lintas universe prefers to slice Indian consumer into survivors, savers, enhancers and splurges...the urban and rural poor are survivors and savers are the middle classes, enhancers are the urban upper classes and splurges the rich” (from Brand Equity 16-22 June 1999 quoted in Chaudhuri, 2001: 211). Maitrayee Chaudhuri points out that “it is widely known that product advertisement has generally given way to lifestyle advertisement. Hence the language of advertisements is more about the consumer than the object to be consumed. The advertisements themselves therefore give overt profiles of new generation” (ibid).

There is a great deal of interest in the lifestyles of the ‘new middle class’ on the basis of consumption as the new definer of group identity (see Appadurai & Breckenridge 1995, Scrase 2002, Chaudhuri, 2005). This increasing consumerism among middle class has an expressive aspect; an articulation of what it is to be mobile, cosmopolitan, traditional or Indian. Middle class can not only be defined as an income group. It has to be viewed in its expressions
of mobility and status. An omnipresent expression of middle class aspirations can be seen in its very visible markers and clues, of how far they have come. As we already mentioned, these aspirational clues and markers indicate more than mere mobility for a person or a group. The new ways of expressing status may be indicators of larger trends. One wonders whether we are at the cusp of witnessing new articulations of group identity in India? One is tempted at this point to ask whether we are moving from traditional/primordial markers of identity, such as caste, ethnicity and so on, to more class and achievement oriented identity. And in the context of the transnational professional, embedded as she/he is between contexts that may pull in different directions, what does consumption reveal? Situated as they are between an achievement oriented society such as US and a society which goes, largely, by ascribed status such as India, the professional middle class may be deploying cues and markers that reveal this state of disjuncture.

It was useful, therefore, to examine the social fields of such transnational agents to see in what way consumption signifies aspects of identity. It is for this reason we have chosen to study the transnationally connected, professional, mobile Indian families from Delhi and Chicago. In this chapter we will delineate our field site for ethnographic investigation and also lay down parameters of the group we are focusing on. In doing this we will explain why we have chosen Delhi and Chicago as our sites of investigation. Also, we will enunciate the criteria for choosing the families for our ethnographic investigation. Having done that, it will be easier to delineate the themes and questions we want to explore. In the latter part of this chapter, we will describe our actual field work situations by 1) giving the social context of their situated fields, and then by 2) talking about the groups of families that were part of the research endeavour.
4.2 Delhi and Chicago: Distant But Connected

It is quite possible that an Indian family living in the suburbs of Chicago might have far more frequent social interactions with their family in Delhi or an extended kin, than with people living within their neighbourhood. The immigrant family, perhaps, does not share any commonalities of culture with their immediate neighbors, but instead interact with people who are far away and dispersed. Culture in this case is dispersed rather than bounded by territory. The bounded aspect of societies – both in terms of place/locality and culture is being affected by the interconnected world. As people move, their culture or meaningful forms also move. And as cultures are mobile and flowing, not anchored to any one place, territories really cannot contain culture. Culture no longer is homogeneously distributed and bounded in a territory (not that it ever was, in a pure sense). As well as the fact that the actors involved in these moving and mobile situations are located in different contexts and meanings. So we are trying to look for a field in a world that is deterritorialised, in the sense that communities, production, politics and identities get detached from the place.

What we are attempting here is to locate our fieldwork sites in a world, which is not amenable for neat segments and boundaries; a bounded culture that ethnographers have been used to posit. The isomorphic association of culture with place and people, into a bounded place, is under revision, that does not however mean that there is no geographical location to the social fields of interactions that we have been talking about. After all, social actors are embedded in particular localities from where they operate. “Places matter because it is in places that we find the ongoing creation, institutionalisation, and contestation of global networks, connections, and borders. Place still provides a foundation for global ethnographers, but as a location from within
which ethnographers can explore the sociopolitical projects that are remaking social relations and places” (Gilles and O’Riain, 2002 272). The location of our actors is vital and thus field-sites are important units of analysis.

Regarding how one chooses a site of investigation, Marcus, as we mentioned in our previous chapter, suggests that two sites could be connected by the flow of things, metaphors, people, plots, stories, allegories. One can establish connections between two sites following any of the items that he has mentioned. But we did point out the perils of overarching focus on the idea of flows. Also, which of the connections established should be given primacy is another question. For example between Delhi and Chicago, there may be any number of connections - business transactions, movement of people, specific goods etc., but which of them to chose is still a challenge and what should be the criterion for such a choice. In our choice of the two sites for investigation – Delhi and Chicago – we have two main reasons for selection of these sites, these are: 1) the location of the self; and 2) the similarities of connections among the sites.

4.2.1 Familiarity with the Field

In our previous chapter, I have very clearly stated my own location in terms of the physical, social and psycho-emotional status in the field. This location offers me a liminality; in being a part of the field and yet distanced enough to be able to reflect on the social life I was immersed in. As I mentioned earlier, the interconnection between places and people, in my case the transnational family was made very palpable when I found myself part of the transnational setting. This afforded me not only a reflexitivity but also the sheer logistics, in terms of where I should be locating my field work. For I have already been part of transnational world of interconnections and interactions between home
and abroad. And also have been in the thick of the social field of the family lives, not only of my own kin but also many other Indians. Thus, I decided that I could perhaps choose Chicago and Delhi as my two field sites for I was going back and forth between these two cities.

4.2.2 The Similarities of Connections Among the Sites

Various analogies have been used to describe the global interconnections across spheres and between places. One very common analogy is the internet with its variety of interconnections, another popular analogy is the human brain. Deleuze and Guattari, propose a similar imagery with their "rhizome," which unlike a tree or its roots, "connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature...." The rhizome is "unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:21).

In a globally connected world to establish connections between any two places is not difficult, especially between two cities. And like the rhizome connections, the connections are not of the same nature. Thus to establish the network of connections between Delhi and Chicago is not the moot point. We do take it that there is criss-crossing networks and connections running across many spheres and activities-migration from Delhi to Chicago and consequential networks, to business and market networks to international organisations and institutional ones, to name a few. We take it that as two major cities they are well connected nodes in a globally connected world. To recall what we mentioned earlier, the restructured economy of globalisation is giving way to new international division of labour such that the there is 'a social division of the world economy' (Hoogvelt, 1997: xii). According to some, there are no clear lines between the international and the external, the internal and the domestic (Roseneau, 1990; Sassen 1996). The new
hierarchies, they argue, cut across all societies. The three tier hierarchy – the elite, the mobile and the increasing masses are found not just in the Third world but the First World as well. The First, the Second and Third World nestle together in the same space in the big/ major cities of the world.

It is also felt that there is more to the similarities of these two cities than them being nodes in a globally connected world. The choice of these two cities is also because of their spatial similarity and heterogeneous character that puts them in a level field, and of course like many big cities they are wired and connected.

In terms of settlement, there is a concentration of Indians in the metropolitan region of New York, followed by San Francisco and Chicago. The state of New Jersey has the most number of Indians followed by California. There is a fair representation of different communities of India, all over US. However, certain cities and townships have concentration of a particular community, like Edison in New Jersey has a concentration of Gujaratis, Livingston in Northern California has Punjabis34. Similarly the cities of New York and San Francisco are dominated by certain professionals much more than others. San Francisco Bay area, in particular San Jose (Silicon Valley), is dominated by software professionals, the metropolitan New York area has finance related professionals and huge working class population. The greater Chicago area has the most number of Indians after New York and San Francisco/ San Jose. Unlike the other two cities, Chicago has mixed populations, in terms of ethnicity and professions. Unlike in California, where the earliest immigrants were from working class backgrounds, the first major influx of Indians into Chicago did not take place until the arrival of graduate students and

34 (Sources: 2000 Census, U.S. Census Bureau; Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, ed. Stephan Thernstrom; Ancestry: 2000, U.S. Census Bureau (June 2004); We the People: Asians in the United States, U.S. Census Bureau (December 2004); ePodunk)
professionals in the 1960s, eligible under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Our research focus being the consumption of the mobile middle class, who we identify mainly by their professions, the choice of Chicago seemed appropriate. Though there is an emerging working class in Chicago “A majority of Indians are professionals, particularly prominent in the sciences, medicine, computer industry, and management (Vinay Lal, http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia ) and these professionals are from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This diversity and heterogeneous background allowed us to not concentrate on any one region or ethnicities and instead we hoped to get a cross-sectional sense of what the consumptive behaviour of the mobile middle class is.

We have chosen Delhi in India for, more than any other city of India, Delhi seems to have far more noticeable consumerist tendencies among the middle class. “A recent survey by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, says that Delhites earn the highest per capita income and are also the biggest spenders in India” (Times of India, 6 Oct, 2006) With Delhi expanding and spreading in to the Suburbs of Gurgaon and Noida, it has been easy for corporations as well international retail houses and malls to set up big offices and establishments in the newly emerging areas. Delhi is no more the sleepy city of bureaucrats and politicians. It now has an expanding economy. Keeping in view the growing economy (this includes a strong presence of MNCs like Microsoft, IBM, GE Etc which have made Gurgaon their base) increasing consumerism among Delhites can be seen in the burgeoning malls. “The cutting edge of this consumer boom is on full display in Gurgaon, a satellite city south of New Delhi that is rapidly developing into mall-rat heaven. Since December, three mammoth, glitzy malls have opened their
doors there, crammed with a collection of stores airlifted straight from America's suburbs Nike, Benetton, Pizza Hut, Subway sandwiches, even a showroom for Bose audio systems” (Michael Schuman\textsuperscript{35}, 2003). Delhi and Chicago are sister cities\textsuperscript{36} which is an incidental factor.

As can be seen the glitzy mall culture, the cosmopolitan nature of the capital city, with its huge populations of immigrants from within the country and trickle of expatriates, makes it an ideal comparative node in the globally interconnected world.

4.3 The Mobile Middle Class Families in Chicago and Delhi

We already discussed our reasons for choosing the emerging middle class, who with their rising salaries and a liberal economy are increasingly embracing consumptive lifestyles. We also discussed the need and importance of studying micro events and process so as to understand how these are but articulations of global expressions of identity, culture, class and gender. It is for these reasons, we have decided to ethnographically study the mobile middle class families located in Delhi and Chicago.

\textsuperscript{35} Michael Schuman writes this in the *Time* Magazine (August, 28 2003). Clearly the remark were made by foreign correspondent, who saw similarities in the suburbs of America and Gurgaon, as far as malls are considered. So it is not just the well-heeled Delhite or Gurgaon resident who wears the new glitzyness with comment such as “people now don't have to live in America...we have it all here...” Many of them have not been to US for them to know whether they have it all. But I have often heard this kind of comments.

\textsuperscript{36} ‘Sister cities’ is a concept whereby towns or cities in geographically and politically distinct areas are paired, with the goal of fostering human contact and cultural links. Sister cities often (though by no means always) have similar demographic and other characteristics. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_twinning)
We are using the word middle class, as a general term of reference to a class of people who are neither rich nor poor but somewhere in the middle. The notion of what constitutes a middle class has been changing over the years. At one time owning a TV or scooter was only possible if you earned a middle class income. Now these items can be bought by lower middle class groups.

"The median family income in India is approximately Rs.4500 a month. By its conventional definition, the middle class includes families whose incomes lie between 75% and 125% of the median. Families with monthly incomes over Rs.6000 are thus above the middle-class line, and families earning more than Rs.8000 or 9000 a month are certainly among the top fifth of the nation" (http://fuel2economy.blogspot.com/2007/04/middle-class-class.html). So when one is talking of middle class in India, it is not the literal middle that one is referring to but to a class of people who earn amounts that do not make them rich and yet they are not poor. Middle class has also been viewed from several perspectives, and the social character of this class, is complex. The Indian middle classes are more divided by language, religion, and social position than any other in the world (Beteille 2001).

When we look at the historical trajectory of the middle class, we do see how the evolution of this class has resonance with the post independent India’s middle class characteristics and yet they are slippages, especially in the transnational contexts. The distinctiveness of this group in colonial times was marked by its socioeconomic resources, such access to English education and modern forms of professional employment. This cultural capital is what distinguished the middle class from the traditional elite. While education was primary moving force of mobility, there were limitations. The middle class could not expand economically. They were limited to serving the British empire, mainly in administrative posts (Mishra, 1961). Fernandes writes that
"the overall pattern of development pushed the emerging middle classes to rely heavily on education as means of achieving access to employment and as means of economic power" (2006:4). The opportunities for this middle class coincided with spatial distribution of colonial power. The presidencies – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay – were the colonial administrative and educational centres that also were the locations for the rising middle class. The emerging middle class with their English education, urban administrative positions, were in ‘an uneasy relationship’ with the traditional elite of the ruling landed class and also the regional elites and the vernacular lower middle classes37 (ibid:5). This unease captures many symbolic and discursive notions on the idea tradition and modern, western and Indian. While there are many variations within the middle class an important continuation that can be seen in contemporary articulation of the middle class is their historical trajectories.

As a term the middle class is very slippery as can be captured in an essentialist notion. Despite the historical and structural embeddedness, the middle class is fluid in reality and therefore has to be analysed in specific contexts. Yet the term is in usage, however unsuitable. It was used in post independent India to capture a class which “while geographically dispersed, was united by its (variable) relationship to the English language, and to the educational and administrative machinery” (ibid) -- what Mazzerella calls the ‘old’ middle class. “This old middle class is being replaced by a new one which is past the ‘colonial hang-ups’ and traditional scruples and knows what it wants. This is the middle class who may be ‘crass and vulgar’, but are the ‘seekers of good

37 The rise of the Bengali middle class has been well chronicled in the Indian historiography, that in a way captures the disjunctures of this group of people in colonial India (see Chatterjee, 1992: Sangari, 2001: Sarkar, 1992, 2001).
life' (Gurucharan Das, 1992 quoted in Mazarella\textsuperscript{38}). They are the consumers of the liberalising Indian economy. Since the 90s the category of middle, whatever its complex social reality, has been brought into public discourse especially, in English media.

The middle class has become a motif around which the aftermaths of liberalisation and the changing societal process are discussed. Many aspects of this emerging middle class ‘culture’ are under discussion (see, Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995; Varma, 1998; Dwyer and Pinney 2001; Liechty, 2003; Mazzarella, 2003; Ahmad and Reifeld, 2003). While the many aspects of this emerging middle class are being discussed, we still do have a “fetish for measurement” (see Verma, 1998) when it comes to categorising the middle class. The economic criterion of middle class has its problems. Someone who is middle class in a small town might be at the margins in a big city. Also there is the self perception that goes with these classes, many like to describe themselves as middle class, even if they fall below the income levels. The middle class with all its complexities and social cleavages is difficult to capture empirically but the discursive space occupied by this class is a reality to be reckoned with. This discursive space occupied by the middle class is our main concern. However, we do not completely dismiss the economic categorisation of middle class, from our analysis.

National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER), classifies middle class as earning income of RS 2 lakhs - 10 lakhs\textsuperscript{39}. This categorisation is a

\textsuperscript{38} Mazarella, William writing on the middle class in India quotes Gurucharan Das’s article - The Dilemma of the Middle class, The Telegraph, July 1992 (source: http://www.soas.ac.uk/southasianstudies/keywords/24808.pdf)

\textsuperscript{39} Source: The Great Indian Middle Class by R.K. Shukla, S.K. Dwivedi and Asha Sharma with assistance from Sunil Jain, Business Standard (2004), published by NCEAR. The report includes study of over 300,000 urban and rural households has broadly discussed for eight income categories, ranging from the ‘deprived’ (those with a family income of under Rs. 90,000 a year) to the ‘super rich’ (family income of over Rs. 1 crore a year) with the middle
good starting point for us, as way of operationalising the category of middle class for the purposes of our study. But to refine this category further, we wish to add other criterion, which essentially would capture various elements of their mobility and transnationality.

We will be studying those families or middle classes, who are; 1) professionals – doctors, engineers, managerial professionals, professionals in print and electronic media. We would also like to include others such as entrepreneurs who own small business who are not necessarily from traditional business communities but who are striking out on their own 2) educated, 3) residents of more well-to-do areas\footnote{Those who live in Karolbagh in Delhi or Dadar in Bombay want to live in Greater Kailash or Malabar Hill” (Dubashi 1993).} of Delhi and the suburbs – mostly South Delhi, and Gurgaon, 4) transnationally connected – (a) those who have immediate family members abroad (by immediate family we mean brothers or sisters or parents) especially in the US, (b) and those who have returned to India.

In Chicago too we will be focusing on Indian Americans who are essentially from various professional backgrounds – doctors, engineers, academicians, computer professionals, financial experts. With a mean family income of $59,777, the highest of any Asian group in America, and with an average per capita income that is more than 25 per-cent higher than the national average, the Indians are definitely among “the professional/managerial middle class”\footnote{This classification is according to Thompson, William; Joseph Hickey (2005) and Gilbert, Dennis (1998) (they more or less have a similar conception of the class system in America).}. This class typically consists of white collar professionals, many with graduate degrees, with educational attainment serving as the main distinguishing feature of this class. According to sociologists such as Dennis Gilbert, James class (income of between Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. 10 lakh per year) in between. It also shows the growth in income class over past 5 years and predictions for the next 10 years.
Henslin, Joseph Hickey and William Thompson, the upper middle class constitutes 15% of the population (Thomson et al., 2005, Gilbert, 1998). A distinguishing feature of the professional upper middle class families in the US is that they typically live in the suburbs of America.

Living in suburban America is living the “American dream”; with sprawling, three garage houses, high ceilings and a house full of appliances, the suburbia represent high living and conspicuous consumption. “In 2005, the average new home had a square footage of 2,434 square feet (roughly 226 square meters) with 58% of these homes having ceilings with heights in excess of nine feet on the first floor. As new homes only represent a small portion of the housing stock in the US, with most suburban homes having been built in the 1970s when the average square footage was 1,600”. To this day, the professional middle class in the United States holds the world record for having the largest homes, most appliances and most automobiles (Ehrenreich, 1989, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_middle_class).

Nearly all of the Indian Professional middle class families live in the suburbs of Chicago. The Chicago metropolitan region42, when combined with its suburbs and nine surrounding counties in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana, is known as Chicago-land encompassing a population of nearly 10 million people. In Skokie, Hoffman Estates, Mount Prospect and Glendale Heights, Indian Americans account for one in 20 residents. In Oakbrook Terrace, Indians make up 10.8 per cent of the population. A large number of Indians

42 “Chicagoland” is an informal name for the Chicago metropolitan area, used primarily by copywriters, advertising agencies, and traffic reporters. There is no precise definition for the term “Chicagoland”. The Chicago Tribune, which coined the term, includes the city of Chicago, the rest of Cook County, eight nearby Illinois counties; Lake, McHenry, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Grundy, Will and Kankakee, and two counties in Indiana; Lake and Porter. The Illinois Department of Tourism defines Chicagoan as Cook County without the city of Chicago, and only Lake, DuPage, Kane and Will counties. The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce defines it as all of Cook, and DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties.
also live in Naperville and Schaumburg (Asian Indians of Chicago, 2004). The Indian families, from professional backgrounds come from these suburbs of Chicago – Skokie, Hoffman Estates, Mount Prospect, Glendale Heights, Naperville and Schaumberg. We would also look at the few families that are living in the city of Chicago.

We have been talking about exploring the ‘families’, in Chicago and Delhi. A note on what we mean by family and what our unit of analysis is, perhaps, in order.

**4.4 Family, Household and Extended Kin**

What constitutes a family is contextual. A. M Shah remarks; “the word family is polysemic, not only in popular parlance but also in social sciences. This is true of English, as well as Indian languages. It seemed to me, that the main source of confusion, in much of the literature on the family in India, was the indiscriminate use of the word family and the tendency to move from one sense of the word to another” (Shah, 1998: 2).

In the American context, a family unit typically would be a nuclear family. In this context, conflating a household, where households are often referred to as a collection of people, who eat together, share resources and live under the same roof, with family is easy. 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. For instance, in a transnational situation, a family may include a household of husband and a wife and their two teenage children,
living under one roof, however the family often extends beyond borders; in terms of remittances and visits by the parents of the couple, the visits many times last an extended period of time. Then there is the distant cousin coming over to do graduate studies who may need some familial support and other such family members who become part of the nuclear family.

Gardner and Grillo point out to the difficulty of operationalising the concept of family or even household. They write: “In practice, however... we found ourselves referring to other entities pertaining to the domestic sphere, notably ‘families’, groups and networks of relatives (kin and affines of many kinds), dispersed through transmigration. In the transnational context, where people, practices and resources are spread between places, ‘the household’ became more and more difficult to define. Indeed, the term was often unhelpfully narrow because wider networks of kin, neighbours and friends were clearly central to many of the ritual events under discussion” (Gardner and Grillo, 2002: 182).

Writing on the Caribbean, Wiltshire comments that the transnational family is a large amorphous structure made up of conjugal and nuclear units, as well as consanguineous segments that spread across national boundaries. A network of interdependent linkages characterizes the transnational family. Critical family functions such as economic support, decision-making and nurturing are divided among the central links in the network (Wiltshire, 1992: 182).

Another aspect that must be taken in to account while looking at the family structures is the kinship system. Kinship patterns certainly have a bearing on gender, generational differences, and status. As Leela Dube rightly argues, the differences in kinship systems and family structures account for critical variations in the ways in which gender operates in different societies. The
underlying assumption is that kinship systems are neither innocuous nor immutable and that, operating through material relations, they express themselves very effectively in the form of values and ideology.

Given this situation, it is not as though we want to abandon any of the key concepts – family or household, but point out to the inherent fluidity of these concepts when used for concrete situations. However, we do want to start with the household as our starting point. The household has been generally defined as ‘including all members sharing a common dwelling and resources, related by, blood, marriage and or adoption’.

We start with a household as our entry point, and then go from there to examine various networks of connections that a household may have. Thus, we may start with household, where the household may consist of a husband and wife and two grown up children who live with them. They may also have their older parents visiting them often or living with them a good part of the year. Though the immediate sister or brother who lives five blocks from their household may belong to another household, they are part of that network of connections and so for the purpose of our study it is part of a family. It may be difficult to avoid the loose way in which we are going to use the term family for the purpose of our study, when we say family here we include in it practically all kinds of connections and networks, which make kin members interact with each other not only in the geographical space but across nations. Because of the nebulous notion of the family which extends across households, geographical places and also for the fact that it does not have fixed membership, our focus on families in Delhi and in Chicago is the fluid connections that include nuclear, extended, affinal and consanguineous. We did not have a fixed notion of how many households we were going to examine for the purpose of our study. But on an average we started out with
10 to 15 household that obviously extend to several familial connections and networks.

We have explained, at length, why we have decided to study consumption surrounding lifecycle rituals, in a family setting. We have also explained the need for a multi-sited ethnographic study of the actors involved in transnational fields. The transnational social fields, as we explained already are aspects of society that touch everyday lives of the people – the polity, economy and culture. Thus, even though we may be looking at specific practices and performances such as rituals we would be situating them in the context of the larger societal structures that they are embedded in. For instance, the way media, in particular Bollywood, can influence rituals, is one aspect. The way religious specialists are available and the religious organisations and institutions that go in this availability can be another aspect, to mention the many aspects of social field.

In the section below, we will talk about the actual field setting as we visited them and try to understand our field sites as the context in which the actors are situated. This section starts by locating the actors in the city of Delhi and its emerging suburb of Gurgaon. This is followed by an account of the immigrant nature of the American society. Our description and analysis of the Indian diaspora living in Chicago and its neighbouring counties is located in the larger context of American society.

4.5 Delhi and Its Suburbs

Delhi is the capital city of India, lying in the Northern plains of India on the right bank of Yamuna river. Many factors go into the making of Delhi as a city - geographical, administrative, political and historical to name only the broad ones. Delhi with an area of 1,483 sq.km is situated between Himalayas and
Aravali mountains. Delhi lies in the flat Indo-Gangetic plains. It is surrounded by Haryana on three sides and to the East, across the river Yamuna by Uttar Pradesh. Delhi’s territories lie mostly on the western side of river Yamuna. However the satellite towns of Delhi, such as New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA) which lies across Yamuna and Gurgaon which is in Haryana, are very much a part of the expanded territory known as the National Capital Region (NCR).
Delhi is city with a very long history. It is one of the oldest surviving cities. Delhi is made of several cities, each built at different periods at different sites. The earliest habitation is said to date back to proto historic past: Indraprashta – the capital of the heroes of the epic Mahabharatha – is said to lies on the ruins 16th century citadel called Purana Quila. (Sharma, 2001:1). The more recent avatar is the evolving, much touted and projected global city: boasting of a state-of-art metro system, expanding roads, malls by the dozen and so on, all indicative of the cities attempt to be part of global world. It seems Delhi is really emerging to be the city which has the most expressive signs of the globalisational effects, not just in its attempt to image makeovers in preparation for the Common Wealth Games - 2010, which it is hosting, but as a city with consumerist and cosmopolitan lifestyles that could easily resemble any city anywhere in the world, at least in pockets.

People who inhabited Delhi in the early decades after independence often recall the city as being more genteel if a tad sleepy. And often the complaint is that the city has been run over by upstart migrants. Anupreeta Das (2001) captures this very well in the special issue on Delhi in Seminar.

The newbies built houses and businesses wherever land was available. Some of them bought space in the nooks and crannies of refugee colonies. Often, they camped on the fringes of the city, and in due course, settlements sprouted and stretched the city’s circumference. Colonies of workers emerged. These were people who partook of the amenities and facilities Delhi offered, and made a grab for everything on display, yet refused to have a stake in city-building. For within their bedroom walls, they still thought of themselves as outsiders. They grouped into nativities – Bengalis, Biharis, Bangladeshis, South Indians, Northeasterners, Kashmiri
Pandits and Punjabis – or sought refuge in professional identities. They were Delhiites because geography and the pursuit of common goals made them so and not because the city offered a unifying identity. As the trickle swelled into a stream, every kind of migrant came to this city in search of work and play – moneylender and his more contemporary version, the banker, the broker, the aesthete, the unskilled labourer, the refugee, the education pilgrim, the socialite, the fashionista, the politician from the hinterland. (2001: 6).

"People from all over India are pouring into Delhi in search of better life, at a pace unlike before and unlike any other city in the country; more by default than by design, Delhi is emerging as the Dream City of India. A city that provides people with job and home," says Gurcharan Das, former CEO of Proctor & Gamble, who shifted to Delhi in 1994 after living in Mumbai all his life" (India Today, December, 6 1999)

"Between 1991 and 1999, Delhi's population has swelled by 43 per cent – faster than any other city in the country – and is now close to 14 million. A stark statistical evidence of the immigrant tide is that over 60 per cent of Delhiites are not Delhi-born. That has changed the beat, tenor and character of the city. From a stodgy government city of the past, the capital has turned into a thriving business centre with both startups and MNCs thronging in. More than half the MNCs that have opened shop in India in the last decade have chosen Delhi as their base. These corporations span the entire spectrum of business activity. The Sonys and the Samsungs of consumer durables; the Daewoos and the Hondas of automobiles; the Motorolas and the Nokias of telecom; and the GE Caps and the ICRAs of finance" (India Today, December 6, 1999). All this is changing Delhi from a political nerve centre to a commercial hub.
A mall in Gurgaon

There is something more basic behind business magnetic charm of Delhi. It's the nation's most affluent market. An average family in the capital earns Rs 21,830 a year against the national average of Rs 9,321 (Ibid).

But income tells only half the story. Delhiites in particular and north Indians in general spend larger proportion of their income on consumption than their counterparts in other parts of the country. "The Punjabi-ism is not just about making it, not just spending it, but flaunting it, remarks Khushwant Singh, the city's unabashed admirer and critic" (ibid). No wonder Delhi has more vehicles (40 lakh) than Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta put together; it's the biggest consumer of soft drinks (about 20 per cent of national sales); and is the single-largest market for electronics and home appliances. Delhi was known for its large flock of government officials who lead quite and sedate
lives, and were not known for their lavish lifestyles, and these class of people were the mainstay of what the middle class constituted. Now that has changed the increasing number of professionals flocking to Delhi with their almost global salaries and availability of goods that fuel their desire to live it up, the nature of the middle class is changing. The mobility and consumptive lifestyle is the essence of their being.

These classes of people, who are now a part of landscape are, cosmopolitan, upwardly mobile in quest of being a part of a global community with their lifestyles and pursuits. To capture this class and their consumption patterns, especially the ones surrounding rituals, I decided to concentrate mainly on South Delhi and also Gurgaon, where most of our desired group, for exploration, lives.

4.5.1 South Delhi and Gurgaon

Real estate values are a good indication of where the rich and upwardly mobile denizens of a city reside. Going by the property rates of residential areas it is clear that South Delhi is definitely up market. South Delhi is also said to be the most cosmopolitan. The expatriates – foreign correspondents, the diplomatic community, employees of the UN organisation are seen more than often in the South Delhi areas of VasantVihar, Defense Colony, a few in Hauz Khaz and GK or some residential colonies. Adding to these sojourners are the Indians who are either citizens or residents of another country; these include traveling corporate employee, academic, NGO workers, journalists etc. Then you have the old time residents of South Delhi areas, retired senior bureaucrats, retired army officers, highly paid moving professionals, a smattering of academics who are more likely to live in rented
accommodations or government constructed apartment blocks, known as DDA flats. A blogger\(^4\) says this of South Delhi:

> An office address in Lado Sarai (which is a village) sounds better than Vikas Puri. A business running out of illegal Sainik Farms sounds more fancy than legal and impressive Netaji Subhash Place in Pitam Pura. To have an office in South Delhi is a more strategic decision, many people say. One of my friends, who has office in South Delhi, once said that one of his clients in Gurgaon did not select his competitor because his office was in the west of Delhi. Not a very encouraging statement for a self-made entrepreneur to hear. I had a friend who harbored an ambition of earning so much so that she could shift to South of Delhi from West.

South Delhi also had a mix of people from many ethnic and regional backgrounds unlike West Delhi, which is supposed to be predominantly Punjabi. North Delhi had old resident of Delhi and East Delhi was mostly north Indian migrants, especially the area known as Trans-yamuna. South Delhi government colonies like Kidwai Nagar, R. K. Puram, Netaji Nagar, among others had a huge population of government employees working in central government organisations, who were from different parts of the country\(^4\). The children of these government employees now represent the new middle class, who are working for big corporations and straddling the global economy and lifestyles.

Gurgaon is much more of newer phenomena; a post liberalisation opening up of economy and the multinational corporate entry into Indian market is what is indicative of this satellite town. It is a boom town that grew with BPO setting

\(^4\) Source; http://www.contentmantra.com/mantrablog.

\(^4\) I grew up in R.K Puram sector IV when I was school going adolescent (early 80s). I remember encountering children (my peer group) and their families, who were from various parts of India. This was my first most prominent encounter of difference, so to say. Our immediate neighbours were Khasis - from Meghalaya, next to their house were Bengalis and next to them were a Punjabi family. The block pretty much had people from different parts of India; the South, the West, East and North India.
up offices in open lands of Haryana. Gurgaon has become the corporate India's new Mecca. Initially when DLF started developing Gurgaon, it was promoted as the cheaper alternative for residents, looking for a reprieve from a crowded, waterless and powerless Delhi. However, over the years (especially since 2003), mainly companies and commercial growth have been shaping the new look of the city.

Many big transnational corporations – Hewlett and Packard, Gillett, American Express, Dell, IBM, Microsoft to name few – and outsourcing companies like Keane, Genpact, Evalueserve, Dell, British Telecom, Accenture, eSCL Global Hewitt Associates and Convergys, have set up their offshore operations and offices in the state-of-art fancy new skyscrapers of steel, chrome and glass, making the landscape resemble any ‘global city’ according to some of the residents who I interacted with.

The Cyber Greens office complex in Gurgaon
The outsourcing boom has led to a rapid growth in employment prospects and local wages, leading to a mushrooming of shopping malls, restaurants and entertainment facilities. Demand for such lifestyle options is driven by the demographic shift to a younger, more cosmopolitan, more affluent and better educated population. This also led to boom in the city's retail industry. "The glass and metal facade of the Sahara Mall in Gurgaon, a thriving township southwest of New Delhi, looks like a perfect emblem of the new India. Emblazoned with logos of clothing stores, gift shops and fast-food restaurants, the mall's glistening exterior seems to capture the exuberance of India's economic boom" (Adiga, Time, September 13, 2004).

It is the upwardly mobile, cosmopolitan, consumerist oriented families that live in south Delhi and Gurgaon that I turned my attention to during the course of my fieldwork.

4.6 Fieldwork in Delhi

I decided to interview and spend as much time with at least 15 families to have sense of what their consumption patterns are. Our criteria for choosing the families that we wanted to explore is, as we explained earlier, is that they should be transnationally connected, and that they have professionals—doctors, managers, lawyers, jet-setting academics, or consultants who work for INGOs etc.

Most of the families I interviewed that lived in south Delhi and Gurgaon were in well heeled pockets and they wore tell-tale signs of their upwardly mobile, status. Many of the neighbourhoods in Delhi that I visited have started to gate themselves into a community separating themselves from the not so well-off
neighbourhoods that typically supply the work force. The gated communities exemplify many things; these by the way are now becoming the order of Delhi and surrounding satellite towns of Gurgaon and NOIDA. They not only separate the working class from the well off, but signal a significant separation, at discursive level, of lifestyles and wealth. The photographs below try to capture this element.

Little security huts outside houses in south Delhi neighbourhood

45 The gated communities represent "a socio-spatial distance from the urban poor and working class" (Fernandes, 2006: 139) Fernandes adds that such instances are part of the strategies that the middle class adopt to claim civic spaces. Such practices exemplify a broader pattern in which civic life in contemporary India is reconstituted through intensification of social exclusion and hierarchy (ibid)
Security men and gates separating the well-off from the working-class-native inhabited-urban-villages

Tree-lined avenue in south Delhi neighbourhood of Asian Games Village
I spent two years and more in talking to families both in Delhi and Chicago. The interviews were open ended, and were essentially extended conversations and interactions with the families of South Delhi and Gurgaon. I set out to interview and get to know 15 families. But it is only after I started talking to a family (more like a household) that I began to realise the transnational connections involved cover more than the family that I made the primary connection with. There were wheels within wheels so to say, which made the whole idea of isolating families by any number or a household did not make much sense. As I started to spend time with families, I realised that I ended up talking to several members of families who include many relatives affine and consanguinal and so there were families within families. For instance, the Malhotras, an older couple who were in their 70s (Ramnath and Vimla Malhotra died in the course of my field work) have two sons. The elder son lives in New York. The son who lives in Delhi (Vivek) is married to a girl from South India (Kalyani), Kalyani has two sisters who are married to professionals who work in the US. One of the sisters (Padma) and her Bengali husband (Sandeep) come to Delhi once a year at least, if not more, to visit the old parents (Majumdars) who live in Kalkaji. Through Kalyani Khurana I got to meet several other families who are part of her extended kin. Often many of them lived in South Delhi which made my field area more circumscribed. The fact that the young professionals who lived abroad came home often helped me to interact with the visiting NRI husband and wife and their children.
A migrant family from rural hinterland living in a one-room garage they work as domestic help etc. in the houses that I visited.

In the course of my two year interaction I managed to attend a few weddings, had also attended some funeral rites and a couple of mundan ceremonies (tonsuring of hair) one upanayana ceremony. While my fieldwork is about exploring different aspects implicated in various life-cycle rituals, I found that I got more exposed to wedding ceremonies than other life-cycle rituals. The wedding ceremonies in any case were major events for families and as such were invested with money and emotions on much higher scale than funeral rites or other life-cycle rituals. They also had the most performative aspect, as
it involved not only coming together of two families (who, in the cosmopolitan context, were often from different, ethnic, caste, regional or often religious backgrounds) but also invitees. Therefore my observations, comments and analysis draw heavily from the wedding rituals.

As I started to gather data I realised that the consumption patterns of the transnationally connected Indians as well as their kin, who went abroad, were influenced by many aspects and factors. For a family who is professionally successful, well moving beyond a middle class background, it was important to show their success and at the same to time exhibit their rootedness. In such situations the audiences, for the performance of rituals, were typically the extended kin who stayed back. For the Indians who live in the metropolis of Delhi it was important to showcase to their cousins (I mean cousins in a generic sense and not literally) who visited them that they were not far behind as far as lifestyle goes.

It is not difficult now to have lifestyle that shows similarities with the Western lifestyle. Increasing global corporate presence with their goods and images has brought the abroad home. The profuse flow of images and goods has certainly impelled cosmopolitan Indian lifestyle choices. The media and advertising compel such lifestyles.

Another aspect that was noticeable is the way families related to each other, though they are separated by distance. With email and telephone communication becoming easy and cheap, families were able to communicate and participate in almost everyday lives (though from a distance and not in a real sense) with their kith and kin. This was different at one level from the

---

46 As one of my informants told me "now we don't have to ask my brother to get anything from US, we get everything from here. And now he also does not feel too uncomfortable, as his children get pizzas to eat and have hot showers and talk to their cousins about similar things".

134
way members of families who left in the early 60s and 70s kept in touch. These globalised flows definitely have brought changes in the way the diaspora relate to India/home and similarly the way the families relate to their émigrés.

The above aspects were equally noticeable among families in Chicago, though why our agents did what they did was dependent on so many factors which were situational and contextual. In our next chapter, we propose to examine some of the chief features and aspects of consumption that surrounds rituals and in what way it touches upon several aspects of their social life. But before it is mentioned as to which salient patterns and aspects we will enumerate and discuss. It will be useful, equally to understand the context of our second site – Chicago and its neighbourhood for the Indian families who live there.

4.7 Chicago; The Multi-cultural Mosaic

Chicago is known as the second city, the first city being New York. The city has a moniker called “windy city”. The Pottawatomie, who settled here before the white settlers arrived, called it 'checaugou', which translates roughly as onion or garlic. Chicago is located in the Mid-western state of Illinois, along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan. When combined with its suburbs and nine surrounding counties in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana, the greater metropolitan area known as Chicago-land encompasses a population of nearly 10 million people.

The city is one of the mega cities of America with a long history of immigration. Successive immigrations created a mosaic of urban enclaves and neighbourhoods, which the city is proud of and the administration boasts of as
showcase for multicultural America. Chicagoans like to think of their home as “multiethnic,” or as “the city of neighborhoods.” Indeed, the celebration of neighborhood is one of the binding rituals of Chicago culture. The shelves of local bookstores are crammed with neighborhood guides of various sorts, and in the 1990s Mayor Richard M. Daley harnessed neighborhood consciousness to the marketing of tourism, officially defining certain well-known districts with banners, signs, and dramatic arches. When visitors come to the city, one of the things they frequently ask to see is “Chicago’s ethnic neighbourhoods” (Binford, 2004). Lately the city has taken to organising neighbourhood tours for the tourist and it also hosts a festival of food—“taste of Chicago” that highlight the multi-ethnicity of Chicago. What is interesting in these tours is that America seems to realise that it is not the “melting pot” that seems to signify successive immigration into the country, but a more ethnic variation where people continue to retain their ethnic identities to some degree or other, and hence the new metaphor of “salad bowl”.

47 The city administration has neighbourhood tours that give a sampling of the various ethnic enclaves—the China town, the Greek Town, the Ukrainian Village, Pilsen (the predominantly Mexican neighborhood) and also Devon Avenue, which is the “little India”. The website has this to say about stopping at Devon “Begin the tour with a traditional welcome at the Indo-American Centre. Concentrating on the vibrant Indian community and culture along Devon Avenue, continue with a guided walking tour, stopping to browse through ethnic grocery stores, delis, and jewelry and sari stores. This is followed by rendezvous at the Indo-American Centre, for a discussion of the Indian culture in Chicago, and a traditional Indian dance demonstration finale” (http://www.chgocitytours.com/).

48 American culture is a powerful force, which exerts its influence not only at home but outside too. But as demography is changing, more and more ethnic groups who are outside the Anglo-Saxon are beginning to gather in numbers to a critical mass, there is resistance to the Americanisation process. In the process the very notion of assimilation is changing and is being questioned. There doesn’t seem to be a consensus on exactly what the melting pot signifies. The metaphor of melting pot, which used to be an article of faith for the self-image of America, is being questioned, especially by ethnic advocacy groups who prefer to use the term mosaic or salad bowl-metaphors that convey separateness and distinction. And this shift is noticeable with passing of the Ethnic Heritage Act of 1974, which contributed to the growth of “ethnic celebrations, a zeal for genealogy, increased travel to ancestral homelands, and great interest in ethnic artifacts, cuisine, music, literature, and, of course, language.” (Halter, 2000).
The metaphors for multicultural America seemed to have moved from the concept of melting, indicating assimilation to a more discrete notion of mosaic, that draws attention to the ethnic enclaves within America. One finds though that much as the popular conception might suggest, these communities are far from homogenised entities enclosed in their neighbourhoods. The term neighborhood itself is very vague and very loosely used to denote a concentration of certain ethnic communities in specific places. These neighbourhoods in fact represent shifting contours of changing patterns and evolution of a city. And this is especially true of Chicago. Changing neighborhoods are reflections of changing history of the city itself. Several factors went into these shifting contours of the city. Immigrant population were part of these changes and represented community initiatives. As waves of immigrants arrived, they displaced older neighbourhoods. That is what is said of south side of Chicago, which originally housed the white protestant as well as Irish Catholic middle classes along the Michigan lake shore. However, with “great migration” more than 500,000 African Americans moved to Chicago between 1916 and 1970 replacing the older residents in the South Side. The great migration is a case in point of the politico-economic and social conditions to the shifting contours of the city.

The great migration refers to the large-scale migration of African Americans from the southern states of America, especially Mississippi. The state of Illinois, like many other Northern states did not subscribe to legally sanctioned racial discrimination, the city however offered very few opportunities to these migrants from the South. Widespread belief in the lack of work ethic and attitudes associated with blacks kept them away from factories. " Allegedly incapable of regular, disciplined work, they were virtually excluded except as temporary strikebreakers, notably in the meatpacking industry in 1904" (Grossman, 1989). The least skilled lower end
jobs in meat packing industry went to the new immigrants lower in the rung, such as the Eastern Europeans. However, things changed during World War I, when there was an increased spurt of industrial activity and decreased flow of immigrants from Europe. Though the doors opened partially for the African American community, it was better than the south in terms of wages and freedom it offered to them. The word quickly spread to the black communities in the South\textsuperscript{49} and Chicago was the new “promised land”, where blacks made their way and men found work in factories and women as domestic workers.

The city of Chicago thus has a substantial black population, owing to the great migration. The places where African Americans are concentrated are the South side of Chicago and the West side. This area houses the lower income black population. As areas with concentration of poverty and crime, they are shunned by the upper class professionals. Indians, particularly, are rarely ever seen in these black neighbourhoods, let alone live there.

In my initial forays into the city with its several neighbourhoods, I did not find Indians in poor neighbourhoods, save for one or more enterprising businessmen who owned a liquor shop. These shop owners were typically non professional with no college education, especially among the first generation, Though they had businesses in such neighbourhoods they did not live there and usually had houses or rentals in the Indian neighbourhood on the Devon avenue.

\textsuperscript{49} Grossman in his book \textit{Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration} talks of migration chains linking the southern states with Chicago, established through the visits by the families, friends and also through the weekly journal of the African American community—\textit{The Chicago Defender}. It seems that an important aspect of migration circuits is the ongoing contact between families, friends and the community involved, whether now in this age of increased communication networks or fifty years ago.
Indian Population in the Greater Chicago Area

The Devon Avenue is a neighbourhood in the north side of Chicago city, between Damen and California Avenue. The length of the street which has many Indian stores and business is also known as "little India". The neighbourhood is the epicenter for South Asian community of the mid-west.
region of the US. Sections of Devon Avenue have been given honorary names that indicate the people who inhabit the neighbourhood. A part of the avenue is called Mahatma Gandhi Marg and the other part Mohammed Ali Jinnah Way.

The avenue caters to practically all the needs of Indians in America. The place is dotted with restaurants, grocery malls, and video and music shops, shops which sell jewellery, books, Indian clothing, and many which sell a strange mix of many of these. The Devon Avenue is an interesting place and a site for ethnographic consideration for it captures the living breathing world of American Indians in one place. Going by the advertising or the number of shops catering to specific needs of a community or an event; for instance you can halal meat or hilsa fish (a variety of fish that is very popular with Bengalis) or a store that caters to weddings, you realise that demand beckons supply. Hindi and Indian film posters are plastered all over shop fronts, including those shops which do not deal with films and music. As much as there is an overwhelming presence of Indian movies there is another which vies for as much attention and these are shops, items, notices and advertising for wedding related stuff, whether it is jewellers, saris, mehendi or wedding videography.

The concerns and demand for things are reflected in the way a single shop will cram it is shelves with everything an Indian immigrant might need: travel-agents, shipping agents, immigration specialist, telephone cards, specialised appliances for Indian cooking (pressure cookers, wet grinders, snack makers, woks, utensils) and others and things of India, all jostle the space. One of the biggest stores in that avenue is a grocery shop which is by far the most popular - the Patel Brothers literally carry all of grocery needs of Indians settled abroad. An Andharite may find it very difficult to get gonguru or
woks, utensils) and others and things of India, all jostle the space. One of the biggest stores in that avenue is a grocery shop which is by far the most popular - the Patel Brothers literally carry all of grocery needs of Indians settled abroad. An Andharite may find it very difficult to get gonguru or dosakai outside of Andhra Pradesh but it is available all 365 days in Patel brothers. Of course, America and globalisation have long dispended with notion of seasonality. But it is still amazing to find that this grocery shop practically takes care of various ethnic particularities and items throughout the year. It is truly a pan Indian grocery shop that, I hazard to say, does not have an equal in any city of India.
A fish seller catering to regional specialties

Notices on windows in shops on Devon Avenue
The posted items cater to both secular and religious aspects of the Indian community.

Most of the Indians who live in the Devon Avenue choose the place either for business reasons or for the level of comfort it offers.50 Many of the Indians who live around the Devon avenue neighbourhood come from non-professional backgrounds, with little university education, especially among the first generation. There are very few Indian families who preferred to live in the city. Their chief reasons for choosing suburbs, as narrated to me was safety and schooling for children, I gathered from my conversation that the city is seen as having corrupting influences of a Western city...of drugs, crime and the distractions of the entertainment....bars, shows etc. The occasional couple one sees in the city, in the more expensive and white neighbourhoods, was young, often newly married with no children, usually second generation Americans. The professional Indian family rarely choose neighbourhoods

50 Many of the people who live here were very comfortable with the idea that the place felt like home....where your neighbours are Indian, and often you could get by without having to speak much English.
with Black or Hispanic populations. The well-heeled professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, IT professionals' bank managers etc. typically preferred the suburbs for living. While I did talk to some of families in the Devon Avenue area, most of the families that I interacted lived in the suburbs of Chicago. Hence my main fieldwork area for the ethnographic research was the suburbs of Chicago.

In Skokie, Hoffman Estates, Mount Prospect and Glendale Heights, Indian Americans account for one in 20 residents. In Oakbrook Terrace, Indians make up 10.8 per cent of the population. A large number of Indians also live in Naperville and Schaumburg. In the period of my fieldwork (which was over a year), I tried to spend as much time as possible in these neighbourhoods, trying to understand and place the Indian families, in the suburban context.
As I was living in the city I could not visit the families on everyday basis. Also most families preferred to meet me on weekends. However, having my own cousins, uncle and my husband's family living in the suburbs was a great help. It means that I could stay for weeks-on end in their house and consequently got to interact not only with their Indian neighbours and friends but also got an additional peep into my and my husband's extended family in the suburbs of Chicago. Without any conscious design on my part, I ended up interacting with families that in many ways covered a broad spectrum of the variations within India - regional, ethnic, linguistic and caste. Though my chief criteria of choosing the families was upwardly mobile professionals, I did not want them all to be coming from any one region or few regions or ethnicities.

Nearly most of the families I interviewed were first generation immigrant Indians. Many of them had green cards, or had US citizenship. Few of these families had grandchildren but most had school going children or college going children. These younger generations could decidedly be categorised as people who were born in the US or have grown up there. However, they all seemed to maintain close contacts with India. Most families made it a point to visit their families in India, at least once every two years if not more. Nearly all the families I interviewed had their older parents visiting for long periods of time.

The intensity and frequency of contact with home seemed to increase at certain periods. Young professionals who had come to America as student, who eventually get employed in US, typically had more involvement with the home, when they are seeking a bride. After they got married and have children there is a renewed and more vigorous involvement with home and older parents. It is the parents of these young professionals who come to their
rescue, as care givers and as agencies of socialisation for the second generation in to the values and traditions of India

While older parents contributed greatly in bringing Indian values and ways to the diasporic young professionals, people also looked to guidance from other non familial sources. In one of my interviews I found a young lady had decided to combine the traditional American ritual of baby showers (a ritual involving gift giving by the pregnant lady's female friends) with god bharai that she had no idea of how to conduct. To learn about she sought guidance from an online site - http://www.indiaparenting.com.

51 One of the often heard laments from parents of young adults, mostly teenagers, was how their children resisted things that they associated with their parents, which of course included their backgrounds, and social contexts, traditions values, this resistance sometimes included food. However, this same children were more amenable to suggestion to Indian things when it was the grandparent that was involved.

52 Here are few comments from the indiaparenting.com, which give you an idea of the nature of advice that is being sought:

Name: KATIE
Country: U.S.A.
Comment:
I WILL BE ATTENING THE 7TH MONTH GODH BHARNA OF A FRIEND. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE WITH ME FOR A GIFT? AND IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL I NEED TO DO WHEN I AM THERE?

Name: Prakash/Gunjan
Country: India
Comment:
We are Sindhi's. My son is settled in USA, Baby Shower is planned for my DIL, what is system in USA, for parents

Name: BS Patel
Country: USA
Comment:
I am a white catholic woman, married to a hindu man (gujarati). Our child will be baptised catholic, his parents want to have a large religious ceremony for a baby shower. I am not comfortable with this since we are raising our children according to our faith. They had requested a hindu wedding ceremony which we had. What am I obligated to do? (http://www.indiaparenting.com/articles/data/art12_003book.shtml )

146
There are many internet sites that cater to a wide variety of needs of the diasporic Indian. A portal called *garamchai* (http://www.garamchai.com) for instance gives links to various sites. These sites are virtual fields of ethnographic investigation in their own rights as they reveal a great deal about the social fields of the transnationally connected, yet away from home, Indians. Thus, in the course my fieldwork I examined these sites as a part of my research exploration.

Though my research centres primarily around the consumption patterns that surround lifecycle rituals, it is important to place the consumptive behaviour in the larger context of the social fields of diasporic Indian community, hence a great deal of fieldwork also involved trying to understand the various aspects of influences that play their part in the way of consumptive behaviour. Thus, the media and the market were worthy of ethnographic explorations. I tried to watch the films that the Indian community watched in order to see how media mediates the everyday choices people make. I also followed the trends and availability of various items and services related to rituals of consumption in the market. This meant talking to various people involved in providing goods and services required like the ones at the temples.

The various influences and aspects of the Indians who live in Delhi and the Indians who reside in greater Chicago will be fleshed out in a thematic way in our next two chapters. Each chapter is devoted to one city. The separate chapters for each city are heuristic in purpose as well as to place the context of the social fields that we will be discussing. We will, however, be going back and forth between these two cities to engage in the criss-crossing transnational influences and connections.