Chapter 5

The World at Their Feet: The Transnationally Connected Indians in Delhi

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter and the following chapter I seek to flesh out, through thick description, my arguments about ritual, family and consumption in a transnational space. The intersecting world of home and abroad is the feature of the transnational space that connects the social life of people across boundaries into a unified social field. Thus our analysis is essentially to capture the main aspects in the social field of the transnationally connected Indians. A core question that is asked of this research project is what do rituals reveal to us that inform the nature of identity in transnational world of the Indians in Chicago and Delhi? While our central focus is on the consumption that surrounds rituals, we cannot isolate and deal with rituals per se. Various process and social structures, and intersecting social fields all contribute to why people choose to do what they do. Therefore, we feel it necessary to talk of the rituals in the contexts, of some of the pertinent and intersecting structures and fields. These are the (1) family, (2) the market: political economy of global world, and (3) the media – Bollywood in particular. Organising my analysis in terms of these themes is essentially for heuristic purpose. It may seem that the discussion is restricted to only these three fields,

53 By social structures we mean such enduring and relatively stable patterns that in some way shape the agency of the actors. We do not suggest that they are overarching as to impinge on the agency of the actors, that we are analysing, but the structures are the embedded contexts of our actors. Institutional patterns and norms do have bearing on the way people think and act, thus caste, family, polity do constitute social structures.
but in the course of our discussion we will be discussing many intersecting aspects as well.

Life-cycle rituals, as we mentioned earlier, are universal and centre on major transition in the life of an individual. They start even before the birth of the child and subsequently mark the significant stages in an individual’s life, such as marriage(s) and death. These rituals for most part are celebratory and performatory, where the main participants are the family, both consanguinal and affinal. While there are other non-family participants and audiences in ritual performances, the family is a significant element in any ritual observances. The family is the focus of the ethnographic endeavour and the mediating structures that play a crucial part in the way families consume around rituals observances. The market and the media are two such mediating social fields of the transnationally connected Indians and therefore become a focus of our analysis. In a transnational setting, it is pertinent to examine and analyse the various aspects: gender, generational differences, and contacts among families etc, in the context of rituals and as a part of the social fields of the diasporic Indians. Thus, family is one of the themes under which I am going to analyse the insights, observations and data I gathered during my fieldwork.

With the world getting more and more connected, with flow of goods and people, not to mention ideas and images, the contacts are definitely getting denser than the previous decades. These flows make available certain objects required for ritual performances. They also make available the specialist needed for such observances of tradition. In this space of flows and denser contacts, there are a variety of things from different contexts that people can choose and imaginatively deploy in their everyday lives. These social fields of people includes in it an imaginative altering, hybridising, inventing aspects of
rituals. There are global flows which definitely mediate and catalyse the alterations. Appadurai, refers to these flows as: five dimensions of global cultural flow through which people deploy their 'social imaginary': 1) ethnoscapes; 2) mediascapes; 3) technoscapes; 4) finanscapes; and 5) ideoscapes. In our discussion, we will highlight these dimensions as influencing and implicating the consumption pattern. We are not however discussing it under the specified scapes as much as concentrating mainly on the family, market and the media, which also talks about the technologies and the political structures as part of the context.

The father of the ethnographic method Bronislaw Malinowski, years ago, has put down prescriptions on methods and 'proper conditions' of gathering data in the field, which since have become classic. In laying out these prescriptions Malinowski realised that it is pointless to ask the 'natives' sweeping general abstract questions on why they do what they do. To really understand what people do, and not just take people's reasons as to why they do what they do, he believes that one must examine the events and occurrences in the context of their cultural setting. “It is only by being in context, being there to talk with and listen to the people you are researching as they experience things and as they go about their daily lives, that one can get them to tell you about how they feel and think. In this way, Malinowski says, you get so much more from people and observe things as they happen not before and after the event” (O'Rielly, 2005:10).

A question such as why people engage in rituals and in what way can only be explained in the context of the imponderabilia of everyday life. The details of everyday life of the transnationally connected India, whether in Delhi or in Chicago, are being analysed in the form of certain tendencies and aspects in the consumption of rituals. Though this chapter discusses the situation and
context of the transnationally connected Indians in Delhi, the larger context of their transnational connections are also examined. Since the sites of consumption that are under focus surround rituals, I tried to observe, participate where I could, and note some of the main life-cycle rituals in the Hindu tradition. It will be good to have an overview of the rituals that we were seeking to examine.

5.2 Life-cycle Rituals

Every ethnic group possesses its own distinct understanding of life’s cycles and its own elaborate set of rituals to mark these stages. My focus is on traditions for four major life passages: 1) birth, 2) coming of age, 3) marriage; and 4) death. There are wide variations, and interpretations in the practice of rites of passage, in the Hindu tradition. They vary in their caste, ethnicity, calendaric interpretations. These rites called *samskaras* – (sacraments) typically fall in the broad ritual categories, associated with various stages of life. There is no unanimous opinion as to the number of rites. The number varies between 13 and 40. The *Gautama Dharmashastra* prescribes 40 samskaras, the *Grihya Sutras* between 12 and 18, whereas the *Manusmriti* mentions only 13. The most traditionally accepted number is 16. Among the ones that are performed, some have made a comeback, especially among some of the Indians in US, like the *ritukala* ceremony, a sacrament celebrating the coming of age of girls. Some sacraments do not find favor among the

---

54 When I tried to come to an understanding of the various rites of passage that come under the preview of the present study, I avoided the various regional and ethnic preferences and practices and instead attempted a general all-encompassing guidelines of rituals that are observed in the course of one’s lifetime. In arriving at this list, I talked to several informants who seemed well versed with “traditions”. I also spoke to some priest both in India and in US. Finally, I had to take recourse to several of the websites that purport to educate Indians, scattered all over the globe, of their culture, traditions and rituals. There are several websites which cater to the cultural and religious needs of the Indians it seems; some of the sites are: www.hinduonnet.com, www.hindunet.org, www.hinduwebsite.com to name a few. These websites offered some knowledge about the tradition of rituals among Hindus in India.
category of people that I was interacting and observing: one such ceremony is Pumsavana; the literal meaning of the term pumsavana is "the quickening of a male child." This ceremony was performed by the husband for the wife beseeching the birth of a son. Some of the rituals, which I have come across in my field both in Delhi and Chicago, are mentioned.

The following samaskaras that are enunciated here are very general and pan-Hindu-Indian in nature. They can be understood in the sense of the broad rituals associated with Hinduism in civilisational sense. However, these rituals are surrounded by minor sub-sacraments and traditions that go with them. Many of the small variations within broad prescriptions of samaskaras are what make up for huge variety between regions and ethnicities.

Religious samskaras serve two purposes. First, they mark clearly the occasion of an important life transition. Second, they solicit special blessings from the Gods and Goddesses, society and community, family and friends. The rituals, most of which are some major as well as couple of minor ones, are as follows:

**Simantonnayana:** This is the "hair-parting" rite. Not commonly practiced today, this ancient ceremony of parting the hair of the pregnant wife was performed to bring cheer as well as ward off evil spirits. Another prenatal ceremony performed during pregnancy is the *godhbharna* ceremony.

**Annaprasana:** During the Anna Prasana Samskara, solid food is fed to the child for the first time. This is done by the father or the mother in the temple or at home.

**Karnavedha:** This ear-piercing ceremony, for both boys and girls, is performed in the temple or the home, generally on the child's first birthday.

**Vidyarambha:** The official beginning of the child's education is performed in the home or temple, during the fourth year, when he or she writes the first
letter of the alphabet in a tray filled with uncooked rice.

Chudakarana: Ceremonial head-shaving is usually performed before the end of the third year in the home or temple. The shaven head denotes purity and egolessness and is said to mitigate past life karma.

Upnayana, Initiation: The ceremonial presentation of the sacred thread is performed in the temple or home between the ages of 9 and 15, when a boy begins the study of the Vedas. Thereafter, he is considered "twice-born." (performed only among the twice born castes of Brahimin, Kshatriya and Vaishya.

Ritu Kala: the ritu kala ceremony is performed to acknowledge a young woman’s first menses. New clothing, jewelry and her first sari are given.

Vivaha, Marriage: The marriage ceremony is performed in a temple or special hall around the sacred homa fire. Lifetime vows and seven steps before God and the Gods consecrate the union of husband and wife.

Antyesti, Funeral: The funeral ceremony is performed or arranged by the relatives according to local traditions. It includes preparation of the body, cremation, rites of mourning, purification and remembrance.

The above rituals were enumerated for the purpose of letting know the range of rituals that I hoped to observe and analyze. As we already mentioned the variation on these rites of passage are numerous, especially in the context of a transnational situation where the rituals may not lend themselves to being performed in a set order. What is a prescribed way of doing, in any case is, always constantly under contestation. However, there are some basic aspects to some of the rituals that are meant to be observed, for instance the elder son lighting the funeral fire. There may be nonobservances of this step for some reason or the other. Additionally, social differentiation has sometimes resulted in duties and obligations, associated with rituals, being performed by specialists, such as obstetricians, outside of the home. With time at a premium
in modern culture most ritual observances have been shortened, or some times
lengthened. Commercialisation has allowed caterers, funeral directors, and
other entrepreneurs to sell rites of passage as commodities. The distance and
changed contexts, absent families and new rituals, objects and space, hybrid
combination all add their additional variation to the already existing variety
that are based on caste, region, ethnicities, cosmologies etc.

Our intention and main focus is not on ritual per se. We are not offering an
account of ritual performances and their deviation from the main percepts, in
whatever form they may be available. Changes and variations are being
chronicled to indicate the changing circumstances and context of these
performances. What is involved in this process is the agency of the actors and
the socio-economic compulsions that are expressed in the way some of the
performances are articulated. Thus, our narrative included observations in the
field and insights and explanations offered by the actors as to the
circumstances leading to changes performances or lack of them.

Also, as mentioned earlier, much as I hoped to capture a range of lifecycle
rituals through my field study, I could not always be part of the observances
and events in the two year period of my fieldwork, as fewer people observed
all the rituals that are mentioned above. And some rituals did not take place
while I was in the field but I had to gather information anyway, as it seemed
an important aspect of the transnational social field that is being talked about.
For instance, I heard about the ritual *ritu kala samskara* being revived in some
families in the US and when I did know of it, I made an attempt to see why
there is revival of this ceremony, through narrations, video watching and oral
recounting of the event⃣⃣.

⃣⃣ I found only one family that I could talk to about this particular ceremony. The lady of the
house, who works at local hospital as an administrator told me that among some her fellow
south Indian friends, the coming of age for the girl was celebrated. Her reasons were that since
5.3 The Family

Migration is one of the important means through which borders and boundaries are being contested and transgressed (Kearney 1991a; Rouse 1991, 1992). “When we study migration rather than abstract cultural flows or representations, we see that the transnational processes are located within the life experience of individuals and families, making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears, and achievements” (Bach et al, 1995). The family is the agency, the medium through which everyday concerns are carried out. As pointed out rightly by Basch and others “contemporary immigrants can not be characterised as the "uprooted." Many are transmigrants, becoming firmly rooted in their new country but maintaining multiple linkages to their homeland” (Ibid). It is this ongoing connections between home and abroad that makes them occupy that transnational social space.

The families we chose in Delhi were transnationally connected in their ongoing relationship with their relatives abroad. This is made possible and sustained by transformations in the technologies of transportation and communication. Jet planes, telephones, faxes, and internet certainly facilitate maintaining close and immediate ties between home and abroad. But the connections to home were feeble for those who left home in the 60s. However, their participation in family back home was palpable mainly in a monetary sense.

she conducted an upanyana ceremony for her son, she wanted a ceremony that would celebrate the coming of age of her daughter. She added that we did not want it to make it seem like announcement to the world that my daughter is now ready for marriage and that she can bear children, which is what they did in my generation in the villages specially. she said we basically had a party...with a few rituals thrown in
The first wave of immigrants to the US was in the 1960s. This was a period of economic expansion for the US economy. The doctors, engineers, and professional scientists who went there were welcomed and enjoyed certain mobility in the professional fields. Their lives were transformed not only by professional success but by the lifestyle of relative wealth, which they had not experienced coming from middle class families in India as they did, which was circumspect in its way of life. As one of these early immigrants put it; “we come from a family that had a scooter... that was the item of luxury and suddenly we could own a car or two and a sprawling house”. The migration by the professionals to America and Europe in the 60s was substantial enough to make the Indian government anxious about its “brain drain”. The perception, not only among the state but within families, was that sacrifices were made by parents and the state to make them the professional they were and that they owed something in return.

The anxiety of losing its best brains was replaced by “a kind of ambivalence through the Indian society and government about migration” (Shukla, 2003:58). Writing about migration and brain drain Sandhya Shukla quotes a 1973 article from the Illustrated Weekly of India, which lauds the achievements of the Indians in America. “There are 50,000 Indians and Pakistanis in New York. Unlike their compatriots in Europe who do menial jobs and live in congested lodging houses, those in the States are educated, affluent and believe in gracious living”. Shukla believes that the authors of the article hold the Indians in US in high regard because of “their class position, in contrast to more working class Indian population of Britain” (ibid). She adds that “for the Indian reader of the above mentioned article, the immigrants in the United States appear less wayward sons than as a part of a formation

56 See Binod Khadria’s book The Migration of Knowledge Workers, where he talks of the second generation effects of the brain drain.
related to the nation and in the interest of the nation” (Ibid). It was around the early 70s that the state began to court the wealthy immigrants in US. The term NRI was introduced with the express purpose of soliciting money for Indian industries. “The term NRI did a great deal of signifying work: it symbolised financial prosperity and the successful Indian community” (Ibid).

It is the wealthy Indian - the NRI - who visits his relatives on an occasional trip to India that is often depicted as coming home laden with items of luxury and tales of luxuries lifestyle that in a way summed up America, for those who are left behind. This relative wealth of the émigré and accompanied sense of deprivation felt by those who are left behind informed an accompanying sense of ones worth in the family settings as well as one’s social status in society.

Among the same generations, like siblings and cousins, some admitted that when their brother or sister came from the US, they were worried if they could provide some of the luxuries they were used to in their adopted country57. They also talked of a certain envy that they felt towards their NRI cousins who spent money with ease - shopping, travel, gifts or on a dinner(s) for the entire set of relatives. The fact that the NRI contributed monetarily, in terms of care for the aged parents, college education for the siblings, marriage expenses etc, gave them a status within the family settings. This added status is especially telling for the girls, who left home to get married to NRI, even in situations where the husband’s family and the husband was reluctant for the wife to contribute to her natal family.

57 I have been told by many in my interviews, of things they did to make the arrival of a son’s(s) or sibling’s stay in India comfortable; the range included renovating toilets to a more Western style ones to scouring the neighbourhood for pizza or pasta places (especially if they were children involved) to renting air-conditioned cars.
In the North Indian marriage system the wife-givers and wife-takers have differential status. The wife-givers being of inferior status, are obliged to offer, along with her dowry a girl is transferred in marriage as kanya dan - gift of the bride; with the dan (dan literally means money, it can also mean gifts or offering) flowing unilaterally from wife-givers to wife-takers. Therefore, the daughter and son-in-law rarely participate in the affairs of the natal family, in the traditional ideal set up. In the South Indian marriage system, owing to preferred cross cousin marriages, the obligations of gift-giving though hierarchical (the wife givers are inferior) have nevertheless less unilinear obligations. These perhaps help explain the greater involvement of South Indian women with her natal family.

The high premium that an NRI groom enjoys and the resulting status elevation is perhaps in keeping with the preferred custom of hypergamy (anuloma); where the father of the bride is obliged to get his daughter married to a groom with a higher standing in society. What is interesting is that the higher status need not be seen only in caste terms. If the groom was ‘well-placed, well earning professional – a doctor or engineer and more lately an MBA working for ‘foreign company’ – then the fact that he is from lower caste often did not matter. It is clear, as have many newspaper advertisements indicate, among other things, that marrying an NRI boy or girl is seen as avenue of upward mobility.

The early generation of immigrants, those who went in the 60s and 70s – whom I am going to refer as pre-silicon-boom immigrants – students as well as professionals invariably looked to India to find a spouse. Typically, among these early immigrants the marriages were arranged and once they got married, they took their wives with them on dependent visas. Some of them eventually found work but some continued to be homemakers. This pre-
silicon boom immigrant’s connection to India was intense at major events in their life – marriage, birth of a child, death in the family etc. Their involvement with home and family was especially noticeable in monetary sense; they were really not part of the social fields of the family, as there were no frequent phone calls, communication through letters etc., where in you discussed threadbare how your child is doing in school, what to buy for the new house, what to order for the wedding menu etc.

It is this generation who often also had certain frozen ideas about home\textsuperscript{58} that were a disconnected from their country of origin. They often had an idea of home with rose tinted glasses; of nostalgia, idealisation and a certain disdain for its lack of civic spaces, professionalism and regressive tendencies. This disconnect not only expressed itself in the way they perceived what they thought were Indian values and culture, but also in the way they hoped to inculcate and reproduce these values in their children. This disconnect, stemming from a real distance from country of origin can be also been seen in the way NRIs came across to Indians back home; an ambivalent respect for their achievements and irritation for their accented India-bashing ever complaining deportment. In familial situation, the NRI relatives coming and going were greeted with anticipation, especially if the relative happens to be sons or daughters. There was a certain trepidation whether they can make their NRI cousins’ stay comfortable. The pre-silicon-boom immigrants interaction in the everyday lives of their family back home were much more sporadlic.

\textsuperscript{58} Second generation Indians living in US, often talked to me about this disjuncture in their parent’s perceptions and the reality they encountered when they traveled to India. A young lady (Anita Jain) who I befriended in Delhi and who has been moving back and forth between Indian and US says this: “in my parent’s India, women did not wear jeans, did not go to nightclubs, married the men they chose for them. But I have been living in India what I saw was different...things have changed here. The new India is certainly very different from my parents idea of India, which in a way is frozen in time” Anita writes about this new India in her book \textit{Marrying Anita: A Quest for Love in New India}. (see also Rayaprol, 2000 and Maira 2002).
Thus, their long distance involvement was not always taken seriously, even if the suggestions came from an eldest son, or a patriarch figure.

There is change in the post-silicon boom immigrants' level of interaction with home. Also there are changes in the socioeconomic status of their cousins who live in India. The mobility among the category of people we have chosen is very discernible; especially among the young professionals between the ages of 30 and 50. For instance, Mr. Ragnathan who used to work for the Government of India, quit after taking a voluntary retirement, and joined a big IT corporation where he was getting paid, almost an American salary; A salary that affords him a lifestyle similar to his siblings who live in the US. Not all the professionals among our chosen families were in the corporate sector, have moved up or changed jobs, such as university professors, senior government officials, they do however admit that the middle class lifestyles have changed quite drastically.

The feeling of being left behind, for those who stayed back (not always out of choice), is not just in the literal sense but also in terms of what the country offered - lack of opportunities, a stagnant economy, ruled by red tape - and a general feeling of going nowhere. This stagnation or lack of luxuries is now being replaced by self conscious middle class affirmation of Brand India. I often hear people say we get everything in India. They have salaries to match their cousins and goods that can be bought in any mushrooming malls and small community markets in the neighbourhoods of South Delhi. These professionals, especially the young now wear their affirmation of India, which is signified by Bollywood and bhangra and bindi and Mehendi and also navaratri fasting\(^59\) (nine days and nights of fasting). Some of the apparent

---

\(^59\) The name Navaratri means nine days and nights; “Nava” means day and “ratri” means night. This festival of Navaratri is observed twice a year, once in the beginning of summer (Chaitra navratri) and again at the onset of winter (ashwin navratri). Typically the
“Indian things” like bhangra and Bollywood have made their way back to India with renewed forced having acquired a ‘cool quotient’ in the West. This is thanks to underground ragamuffin Punjabi identity of the working class immigrant of London, which eventually reached the hip DJ dub world of Asian ‘underground’, of New York (Maira, 2003). There is a generational difference between the ones who were left behind in sixties and the ones who rule the urban India; the upwardly mobile and their children.

The increased flows and global liberal economy is the setting in which families are relating differently from the 60s and 70s. In the pre-liberalisation days when NRI relatives visited India, it was welcomed with mixed emotions of anxiety by their kin back home, who fretted about providing comforts to the NRI relatives, comforts that they could ill afford and were hard to come by.

The ITC technologies have facilitated in expanding the social fields of the family dispersed as they are all over the globe. A lady that I interacted with narrated her experience of reconnecting with her cousins from all over the globe through the internet. Sujata Kumar, a professor in a university, told me the amazing way she connected back with her cousins, their children, uncles and aunts. It happened when she came across some old photographs that had family members that she did not know about. She sent emails to as many cousins and aunts and uncles who networked through their contacts. This episode resulted in the relatives forming a network group much like myspace

---

fasting is undertaken to devotion and invoke and appease the shaktik goddesses of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

According to one of my informants from Delhi, who is senior journalist in a leading newspaper: “more and more young people combine clubbing with navratri fasting. When I was young I did not think it at all cool to participate in rituals or what seemed like bygone traditions which did not make sense to me. I think not only me but many of my colleagues were these self-conscious modernist, and we are not in to navratri fasting. And then I see a whole lot of young people observe these traditions. They seem to valorise them.
and *Facebook* communities. Through this virtual coming together of the family into an internet group, Sujata admitted they are far more in touch with each other. She said "now we post photos, events in each other's lives and generally keep each other posted. With some of them "I have developed a connection that resulted in us becoming friends...sharing our deepest darkest secrets. In some ways I am closer to my far off cousins. I have made connection with them rather the ones who are closer at home". For Sujata, a divorcee, who now lives with her two children in South Delhi, it was easier to relate to her cousins who live abroad, as it was easier to understand divorcee state instead of looking at it as social transgression of sorts. While this friendly, cosmopolitan connection might work for some, for others the expanding ambit and participation of various family members in the everyday lives can be interfering. In that sense even though the families are located far away their participation is very much felt.

Family disapproval articulate themselves in snide remarks and oblique references (if not downright condemnation), which do not always put one in a

---

60 "A new generation of social networking websites appeared in 2002 with the launch of Friendster, whose founder, Jonathan Abrams, admitted that his main motivation for creating the site was to meet attractive women. Unlike previous online communities, which brought together anonymous strangers with shared interests, Friendster uses a model of social networking known as the "Circle of Friends" (developed by British computer scientist Jonathan Bishop), in which users invite friends and acquaintances—that is, people they already know and like—to join their network.

Friendster was an immediate success, with millions of registered users by mid-2003. But technological glitches and poor management at the company allowed a new social networking site, MySpace, launched in 2003, quickly to surpass it. Originally started by musicians, MySpace has become a major venue for sharing music as well as videos and photos. It is now the behemoth of online social networking, with over 100 million registered users. Besides Myspace and Friendster, the best-known social networking site is Facebook, launched in 2004. There are dozens of other social networking sites, including Orkut, Bebo and Yahoo 360° (Christine Rosen, "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism," *The New Atlantis*, Number 17, Summer 2007, pp. 15-31.).
complimentary light. These are typical ways the family politics and sanctions operate and even from a distance. Anita is a young Tamil Brahmin girl, who grew up in Delhi. She was brought up with a certain amount of cosmopolitan outlook, which is also encouraged by her parents who themselves do not subscribe to 'antiquated notions' of bringing up a young lady. Things like dating etc have not been a taboo for Anita. Her decision to get married out of caste (to a successful Dalit) is a source of familial disapproval where notion of tradition and Indian culture are summoned by the relatives and according to Anita “strangely from my relatives – aunts and uncles – in the US.” Her aunt (mother’s sister) in some ways still harks back to her growing up as young girl in India, as protected, abiding of customs and traditions. She continues to maintain a semblance of things she has grown up with and tries to inculcate this in her own daughter. Training in Indian classical music or classical dance is *de rigueur* among the Tamil Brahmans living in US, often accompanied by vegetarianism, at least at home. Along with this is a serious concern, that their children, should not end up like Americans who, many Indian parents believe, have rather lax moral lives, bordering on promiscuity.

In the context of this concern to raise their children with ‘traditional Indian’ way, the contemporary relaxed raising of children in cities of India is disturbing and confusing to the diasporic Indian. I heard some of the parents express the opinion that these “young people are imitative of the West in their lifestyles. These kids have boy friends, come home late from parties. We don’t allow our children that kind of unbridled freedom.” With an attitude such as this the extended family living in US are constantly struggling to keep up what they think are Indian values and berate the fast changing landscapes in big cities of India. Much as these NRI relatives may be a source of inspiration in terms of achievements and economic wealth they however represent elements of regression and outdated values. The term ABC —
American Born Confused Desis – is often used to refer to second generation Americans for their hyphenated identity being Indian-American and therefore being confused. But I have often heard the second generation complaining that it is their parent’s, who are confused, neither being in India nor in America. For their part they are more comfortable with their identities, which they believe is primarily Indian in origin, they are, however, American in their thinking and upbringing. I have heard second generation young Indian Americans say that the “idealised India of their parents imagination is changing” As has been discussed, the extended families participation in the lives of people back home is mixed bag of cosmopolitan outward look that welcomes the changing values and on the other the preservationist who valorize and idealise “Indian values”. These elements within family have tangible influence and presence on the agency of the family members.

The surprising force with which family gossip and grapevine is carried on long distance and subsequent social sanctions leading to altered decisions is a case in point of the expanding ambit of transnational family connections albeit aided by communication technologies. A telling example of this is when I encountered a young diasporic Indian, Bijoy, who was visiting Chicago from Germany. He was staying with an aunt and uncle who were not popular in the family circle; owing mainly to the uncle’s drinking problem, and also for the fact that the uncle according to the family is too much of an ‘American’.61 Bijoy was supposed to stay with an aunt, who he found way interfering and moralising, so he chose to stay with the black-sheep of an uncle. This decision was soon changed for him in the space of an afternoon that he spent time with us. The aunt whom he was supposed to stay with called her sister in Beijing and told her the whole story, the sister in turn called her cousin in

61 When I asked Bijoy what the relatives meant by too American he said” you know he drink, never saved enough money, traveled instead of buying a house does not have kids, has American friends...who are regular guys like plumbers, truck drivers and singers in rock-bands...everything a successful Indian in US does not do...and yes he also lives in the city.
Delhi who is the brother of Bijoy’s mother. And he in turn called Bijoy’s mother in Munich. I suppose the family disapproval was overpowering enough that Bijoy decided to move out of the not so popular uncle’s house, instead of resisting family pressure. He said to me; “you don’t know my family, they are all over, there is no escaping them. Nothing will stop them till they make me do what they think is right. My mother is actually quite chilled out…let’s me do what I want but it is her siblings who get after her and she gives in and then puts pressure on me to comply.”

The forces pulling and pushing the families together are influenced by a mix of cosmopolitanism and tradition. By cosmopolitanism, we mean, a person subjectively locating herself in more than the locale she lives in. This sense of cosmopolitanism can be seen in the way the larger world, typically the West, is consumed; yet it wants to valorize the local and the so called traditional. In writing about this kind of new cosmopolitanism, Geeta Rajan and Shailja Sharma find that the second generation immigrants are more apt to chose the cosmopolitan identity. They write:

Theorist of traditional diaspora like Robin Cohen, Kaching Tololyan and Safran have posited diaspora as stable fixed populations, Though consisting of people displaced….they are nevertheless bounded in space (at a distance from homeland), and through their bipolar relationship to the homeland. However we define new cosmopolitans who blur the edges of home and abroad by continually moving, physically culturally and socially and by selectively using globalised forms of travel, communication, language and technology…in multiple locations, through travel, or through cultural racial or linguistic modalities (Rajan and Sharma 2007:3).
Rajan and Sharma are referring to the Indians in America, particularly the second generation Indian-Americans. However, their idea of cosmopolitanism is equally applicable to the upwardly mobile young Indian professionals who are transnationally connected. Their lifestyles indicate this cosmopolitan influence. The South Delhi, or Gurgaon shopping areas, don’t have to make too much of an effort to sell the global life. Ulrich Beck says, in the context what constitutes cosmopolitanism, that the elements that make up our everyday lives, elements as diverse as food and memory can not be located locally (Beck, 2002). These upwardly mobile Indians are more likely to travel outside, purely for vacationing, to Europe or to the West, have American style homes with modular kitchens, Jacuzzis, wooden floors completed with a lazy boy. The global influences on food are evident too in the way different ethnic restaurants are mushrooming in India. The consumption of global food and changing contours of eating habits, for instance, reveal the logic of distinction (see Bourdieu, 1984) wherein each class would like to distinguish itself from the one below them and the ordinary as an indication of their status in society. Thus, when Chinese becomes common enough to be eaten by the most ordinary of people like the lower middle class and even the working class then it is time you move to more exclusive, authentic and rare food.

62 Eating out has reached such proportions, both in big and small cities of India, that a issue of Seminar “Culinary Crossing” (2004, October) is devoted to the global influences on eating and culinary habits. In many of articles it is observed there is a culinary leap as far as trying different cuisine is considered, trying out something like sushi that involves eating raw fish is far too adventurous for Indian palate, but the few sushi places in Delhi are a big hit, among the people who are eating sushi” some are expatriates but many are Indians, younger, more alive to global food trends, having traveled or lived abroad and walked in and out of sushi bars” (Malik 2004;67).
It is this need to distinguish themselves which is the defining feature of the mobile professional classes. The consumption pattern reveals the influences of distant world and the local at the same time, 'glocalisation', as some would say, a moving between tradition and cosmopolitan. It is against these intersecting influences and orientations and discourse we like to see the family, the performance of lifecycle rituals and what is consumed in these rituals.

The diasporic influences, especially among the mobile generations, are evident in the way some of the ritual performances are imagined. There is now a definite slant towards visualising the rituals as avenues to celebrate the traditions and culture. Often aspects that are buried are revived and certain other aspects are barrowed. For instance Mehendi ceremony is not a part of the wedding repertoire among the Nair community of Kerala. A Nair families wedding that I witnessed in Delhi wanted Mehendi and ladies sangeeth, which is clearly not part of the repertoire of the traditional wedding ceremony. The Nairs of Kerala, are matrilineal family whose wedding ceremonies were notoriously matter of fact and small, indicating the importance they placed to the notion of matrimony, as Nair women were known to have liaison with Namboodri men, called sambandam, the marriage or kalyanam is a token acknowledgement. But with rituals assuming celebratory aspects there is as much fanfare thrown up especially around the big event of wedding. Even the smaller ones are now taken up on grand-scale as it happened with the upanyana ceremony of Tamil Brahmin family (both the husband and wife are young professions, the husband is an IT professional and the wife is a corporate manager) who moved back to India after along stint in US. Their reason for making an elaborate show of their reverence for tradition was also accompanied by a need to reconnect to the families that they had little contact with previously. Though, a family member grumbled, discreetly of course,
that "they are showing off by making it like mega-wedding event. I think they want to say they have money and that they have not left their traditions behind". The parents of the couple, (the father is a retired government official and the mother is a homemaker) who are well versed in the traditions and samskaras admitted that it was unnecessarily elaborate and there was too much money spent. They said "for our son we had very simple ceremony. Just few family members, not all these gifts....but then we did not have this kind of money either".

Another family who returned after a sojourns in US talked of how they barely performed any rituals. Mrs Mishra whose two children live in the US said: "In the 60s when my husband taught in US, you could get nothing... no priest and no ready made havan mixes etc. and besides I was raised with no poojas and rituals But I tried to have some semblance of traditions, considering we were away from India and I wanted my children to have sense, at least a little bit, of what our culture is. I called my grandmother from New York and asked her about the basics of mundan ceremony. I took my child to a local barber, did some pooja at home, all my relatives were in India, so there were no big gathering and that was it. But my son wants to have a big ceremony for his child." The son, Vinay, that Mrs Mishra was talking about lives half of the year in US and the other half in India. His wife works in India and is professor at a local college, their three year old son lives with the mother and the grandparents. This is another instance of generational difference or a difference between older middle classes who placed value on non economic deployment of cultural capital, that was also informed by Nehruvian ideal of modern and secular India. This generation was self consciously modern that shunned tradition, if not overtly, and so placed little value in traditional practices of ritual, save as rote practices that had to be done.
The need to cling to artifacts and memories of home through observances of traditions by the diasporic communities has been well chronicled and established. The returnee Indians do fall in to a similar mould in the sense that they have to establish their Indianness not only out of nostalgia perhaps but to reiterate and make known that they are Indian in their observances. In this attempt often there is a very conscious and earnest involvement in trying to understand the 'meanings and purpose behind some of the ritual observances. A priest said “the NRI are more interested in our traditions than the Indian families here. Many of them ask me the meaning ‘behind’ the performances and shlokas”.

The returnee Indian might go over board in trying to recreate and observe rituals in an attempt to reiterate to themselves and to their relatives that they are not sullied by the West despite their stay. Their cousins and relatives who have not really left home have perhaps different motivation than their returnee cousins.

Talking of motivations or reasons it is very difficult to really pin-point what exactly is being conveyed as many members of the family are involved in the decision making process how a rituals ought to be conducted. For example, Nita a second generation American who is in her late twenties was married in India, as it was convenient to have all the family members gather in Delhi. Her husband’s family is well settled in America as well, however both the grooms and the bride’s family decided to have a wedding ceremony that reflected their Indian roots. In the West, the wedding day is typically the bride’s day and she has a lot of say in what it should entail. Nita wanted that her wedding should be done in a way that she desired. She took the help of her uncles and aunts for executing her ideas, something that did not go very well with some of the elders in the family, who were chiding her and letting her
know that “the bride in India is not supposed to do anything but sit back and let the elders do everything”. Nita tried to introduce elements of Western wedding set up such as seating arrangements with name cards, which were ignored by the guest and relatives and a wedding toast which also did not go too well. As much as she tried to have the wedding day planned in the way she wanted she found herself constantly in tussle with other members of the family. The idea that the elders have the main stay in the major decisions involved in family is still largely held, but I did notice that it is the groom and bride who are now begin to assert the way they want their weddings to be. The generation who are getting married in contemporary India and the one we are referring to in our research want to make major events in their life memorable as much as defer to tradition and culture.

The new generation who is professionally mobile and much wealthier than their parents generation wants to make life memorable and enjoyable especially special occasions that are traditionally been invested with significance such as first hair cut the first time a child has rice or grain, the name giving ceremony but also graduation from school or college which are also celebrated by offering special pooja or archana at a temple or taking a family vacation to European destination or some exotic island. For the generation flush with money every significant life events has to be remembered and memorable and more than anything enjoyable. It is this aspect of celebration of rituals performed, in an age where celebration, culture and tradition are mediated through the media and the global markets, the flow of things across the continents. In the following section we are going to talk about how the global markets, are implicated in making, changing and hybridising elements of rituals.
5.4 Marketing Culture: Making Traditions Available

In her book, *We Are Like That Only: Understanding the Logic of Consumer India*, Bijapurkar, one of India's leading experts on market strategy and consumer issues, warns against easy generalisations about India and its liberalising economy. She encourages businesses to look at the country through multiple lenses. All manner of factors are at play in India: varied demographic, psychological and cultural characteristics that, countrywide, span more than 29 different languages spoken by over a billion people, across half a dozen major religions, hundreds of castes and ethnicities, and significant regional differences. Indian businesses and corporations, as well as the global business are trying to cater to these varied differences. In the present age of global connections and flows and strategies of flexible production and marketing, "transnational culture industries are adept at responding to and manipulating the cultural politics of local identity and difference", writes Gage Averill (Averill, 1996:203). Writing about the way global markets tailor to Indian taste, however limited in their targeted audience, Gage says; "In early 1995, Kellogs introduced corn flakes in to Indian markets, where it was previously available only as a specialty item on the black market for $10 a box, billboards in the countries major cities boasted that cornflakes were "changing the way India eats breakfast" Kellogg was counting not on the great majority of India's population, but on a technocratic, managerial and business classes with a lifestyle in rapid flux - a group that can be termed a comprador elite or a transnational capitalist class...and it serves as a form of advertising for a consumerist lifestyle in India" (ibid).

Even though the targeted audience is cosmopolitan enough, Kellogs Indianised their product to introduce 'basmati rice flakes' This is just one example of the global corporations trying to think local and yet retaining the global concepts. Elsewhere there are introductions that may even seem alien
to Indian cultures such as Valentine day celebration of love, which is largely media and market mediated.

Not only are occasions such as Valentine made its inroads in to the celebratory culture of India but also little known community oriented regional festivals have been getting media and commercial attention; be it chhat (a very popular festival in Bihar) or kawarias who now get sponsored by small and big businesses, on their journey to the holy Ganges. Businesses are quick to enter in to areas where they can respond and even create a need where possible. During the course of my field work I heard people say how they got to know of certain aspects of tradition through paper or TV, For instance one lady admitted that she never really knew about the dhanteras (a tradition of buying cold on a auspicious day known as dhanteras), but she read that it is auspicious to buy gold on this day. From a low key tradition, that is predominant in north India, it has not only spread to other parts of India but dhanteras has become the new shopping rage and an occasion for diwali corporate gift item.

Festivities, auspicious dates and cosmologies were followed by an older generation of people, who were more in tune and touch with lunar calendars. Now in families bereft of such elders who kept in touch with the non-Gregorian calendars it is the media and markets specialist of cultural traditions who inform the populace of the significant dates and events. And these revoking of traditions by media and other cultural or religious specialists are flexible enough for interpretations and facile following, keep in view the busy life styles of cities. A priest that I spoke to was very vocal about how ‘priest now days are flexible with regards to duration of sacrament and the items that are to be part of a performance. He added that “even auspicious dates can be fixed according to the convenience of our client”. In a transnationally
connected situation such as the families that I am referring to, a date for performance of a ritual is important, as it must suit the NRI kin who will be visiting India. Typically it is when children have their break from school and the busy professional parents can take off from work. It makes business sense to tailor make what may seem as cumbersome traditions to suit modern busy lives, and these is what corporations, small business and services seem do, making it easier for people to follow traditions that were earlier household and community oriented. In the present setting where families are likely to be nuclear, with husband and wife working and the elders not always being there to engage in everyday activities it is the larger society which is now stepping in to providing services that were taken care by families - immediate and extended.

Various business and services have launched themselves in to the burgeoning market of celebration and culture which is what sets apart the way rituals are celebrated these days. The wedding market has been much written about as the new booming business, The Indian wedding has now become a genre in itself all over the globe, a way of celebrating and creating a fairy tale fantasy that will be remembered by the guest and the couple who are getting married. The lavish weddings thrown by the steel magnet Laxmi Mittal for his daughter is the much touted celebration of Indian custom of wedding and obviously a show of wealth; followed closely is the hotelier Chatwal’s wedding that is

63 The big fat Indian wedding business is going global. Soon the unique wedding exhibition, Celebrating Vivaha, will spread wings to three countries: Britain, Malaysia and Singapore. Come May 2008, the wedding extravaganza will charm Britons and non-resident Indians (NRIs) at the Barbican Exhibition Centre, London. A three-day exhibition from May 16 will try to cash in on the Indian root and a growing fascination of foreigners for the Indian way of tying the nuptial knot,’ said Rohit Moona, the business coordinator of the Celebrating Vivaha exposition. The organisers of Celebrating Vivaha are also hoping to take the event to the US, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh by 2009.

64 Now there is show on Travel and Living channel called “the great Indian wedding” which kicked off with a feature on Sant Chatwal’s son Vikram Chatwals fantasy wedding with model Priya Sachdeva that lasted 10 days in three cities, Bombay, Udaipur and Delhi. The
said to be showcasing India to an international list of celebrities. The brand India is now an item of consumption, replete with orientalist notions of palaces, flowers, elephants and show of opulence but with heady mix of cosmopolitan inputs – champagne, caviar, models, new-age gurus etc.

A Western couple taking wedding vows in the ‘Indian-wedding’ style in Goa

Chatwals live in New York and the bride is from Delhi. It was a multi-million-dollar celebration, during which 600 guests from 26 countries were ferried around on chartered jets. The guest were flown from all over the world in private jets. “It’s the biggest wedding I’ve ever done,” says New Delhi–based Vandana Mohan, who has been planning Indian weddings for almost twenty years. Her duties included overseeing fourteen special hospitality desks set up at each hotel and a fleet of 70 private cars for the three-city tour. Fifty thousand kilos of flowers were shipped in from Holland, Bangkok, and Calcutta, and 3,000 candles were burned. They went through 65,000 meters of fabric that was used for decorations etc. The 20,000 kilos of white flowers were for the night’s elaborate white-and-silver theme party, complete with a painted elephant roaming the courtyard. It was Valentine’s Day, under a full moon: perfect, except for one puzzling fact. “White is not an auspicious color,” said the wedding planner. In India, widows wear white.
Not everyone may aspire for a multi-million dollar wedding in line with the Mittals or Chatwals but weddings in particular have expanded to spectacles and items of conspicuous consumption. Purnima Mehta, the wife of a retired senior corporate executive, recently hosted her daughter's wedding. She says organising a show with style is important in a society where weddings have become statements. "I may have personally liked a simple ceremony, but who wants it? Not the children, not the family - and you know everyone is sizing you up at the affair," she said. And so, many now opt for several days of feasting and dancing. The parties might boast settings based on famously elaborate Bollywood films, fresh orchids flown in from Bangkok, perhaps a hired Mercedes instead of the traditional horse to carry the groom. Neeta Raheja, a wedding planner in Delhi, describes the difference since she entered the business in the early 1990's. "They hire helicopters, and they (the helicopters) are showering petals. When I used to do it (earlier), we used to have elephants standing in a row and showering petals, but I think this is the tech age, and you can go as bizarre as you want to," she said. Such celebrations add up to big bucks: the wedding industry is now a Rs.800 billion market that is swelling by 25 percent a year (source: http://www.nerve.in/Item/news) These lavish affairs can wipe away years of savings for many families, but no one is complaining.
Elaborate decoration and canopies is order of the day in wedding celebrations

The booming business has prompted property developers to design one-stop wedding malls that provide everything from the wedding outfits to the honeymoon plans. The first one opened in Delhi in 2006. More are being built in other cities.

In an expanding market no stone is left unturned. Every aspect of tradition is invoked in various emotive expressions; of authenticity, nostalgia, belonging and celebration etc. If not directly addressing any particular festival or celebration, there is a cornucopia of cultural artifacts, services and other paraphernalia that makes it easier for people to engage in traditional performances, rituals being a part of that cultural repertoire that is made accessible through the market. The combination of media and market has made traditions possible again.
Not everything is a homogenised conception of what ought to be, there is play of imagination when it comes to celebrations and ritual events that has an interplay of the larger world and the local. Diwali gifts for instance do not remain local alone anymore as increasing number of upper middle class people have money to spare. The tradition of gift-giving is expanding in its ambit, giving expression to their upwardly mobile status. The gifts so chosen are meant to set them apart from the common person and make their choice exclusive. Thus, traditional sweets have become passé while expensive imported chocolates, wine and champagne are the new ways of doing things.

Global food and beverage industries are quick to notice the need for exclusivity among the mobile middle class. After all, the reference point is always the upper classes whose sense of taste is what one wants to emulate to belong to those aspiring classes. Who is the reference point is always subject to the very specific nature of the family's own history and its social position in society. For instance a Dalit middle class family which has a history of claiming a modernist middle class roots (two generation of middle class orientation with English education, and having served as civil servants) has as its reference point a cosmopolitan upper middle class. On the other hand for a first generation middle class family (whose roots still lie in rural areas) the audiences and reference points may be the rural upper middle class. And for them a display of wealth could be in terms of jewellery and not expensive champagne. As Bourdieu (1984) points out, it is the 'affiliations of taste that forge the unconscious unity of a class' than any explicit views, statements or opinions. The dominant class asserts its lifestyle as the benchmark of 'good taste' to which others must aspire, and in so doing legitimises class differences. 'Fine' wine, 'fine' dining etc., are part of the repertoire of good
taste that the transnational cosmopolitan high class have, and that anyone aspiring to be part of the higher class must acquire.

Consumption of wine and alcohol and global foods is one import that is taking root in the emerging lifestyles of well-heeled, and for the wine business India is being seen as a new market. "Indians love to celebrate occasions, weddings etc. Wine could become a part of the celebration culture," says Mr Nestor Riveros, Minister Counsellor of the Commercial Office of Chile in India. (Businessline, Saturday, May 18, 2002).

The retired Tamil Brahmin parents that I interacted with said they would have liked to have a traditional wedding ceremony for their daughter (she was getting married to an American) which they more or less did. But at the same time they let their daughter talk them into serving cocktails in pre-dinner engagement party, so that the more cosmopolitan guest are well hosted. The fact that they spend six months in the US with their daughter and another six in Delhi with their son and daughter in-law who is a Bengali, and as they say "is not a Brahmin and not a Tamil’ has helped them come out of milieu that is restricted to a way of doing things that is caste or community based. In some sense they are in a hybrid zone.

It is not just the families with a bride or groom who is from the US or the West that warrants a cosmopolitan hosting but others too. Families that I interacted in Delhi, have varied hybrid introductions in their wedding ceremonies that are not so Indian in their origin. Many Indians now like to celebrate special occasions with wine or champagne and it is certainly becoming an aspect of ceremonies. Some families talked about serving alcohol at receptions, engagement parties etc. The tradition of drinking among the barathis –the groom’s party, is quite common among the Punjabis and
many North Indian families. But now even among the South Indian upper
castes it is beginning to be an accepted mode of serving and hosting. There are
other lifestyle inspired traditions, which are not particularly Indian in origin
such as bachelor’s parties or even bachelorette’s parties. These are now
becoming a regular feature and considered ‘cool’ and way to really live it up.
In the bachelor’s parties, sometimes a stripper is called to entertain the groom
and his friends. A young couple that I interviewed, whose parents (father is
retired colonel) live in a posh residential locality of South Delhi, talked about
the bachelor and bachelorette’s party they had. The bride and her friends and
the groom with his friends went to Bangkok (separately though) to “live it up
and go wild.... away from the censorial eyes of the parents”. Not all of them
need go to Bangkok to live it up. Delhi now has services\textsuperscript{65} that cater to such
pre-wedding celebrations that are becoming a part of the wedding rituals.

The DJs in wedding ceremonies are the other must-haves that are accessed
through various wedding planners and services that dot the city. The idea of
having DJ to provide you music has become a part of the wedding itinerary
now. Djaying as a concept is a Western one, where the jockey is in-charge of
music. The original DJs are basically the vinyl disc spinners who set their own
beat, who are integral part of a performance. But in Indian weddings they are
asked to cater to various occasions and spin out different kinds of music. This
may include bollywood music, club beats, ladies sangeeth etc. Indian
weddings have been music oriented with traditional bands – brass bands,
\textit{shehanai/nadaswaram} (The Indian clarinet), dholaks players etc. Besides,
these there were traditional song and dance that generally got to be known as
‘ladies sangeeth’. While some of the traditional music is still in place, the DJ
now seem to have become an integral part of most marriage ceremonies. In

\textsuperscript{65} Services for strippers are not advertised openly though, there are several outfits that
advertise simply for bachelor/ette’s party.
the marriages that I witnessed, only one family, who is south Indian made an
effort to have a band of nadasvaram players to come all the way from the
South to play for three days of the wedding rituals. Nearly all the marriage
had DJs. In the context of Indian weddings that I witnessed many of the
wedding revelers preferred music that one can dance to. Bollywood music has
become the staple in wedding gatherings. Bollywood and TV soaps have a
definite impacting on the choices that people make in how they would like to
celebrate the special events in their lives.

Bollywood inspired dancing at a wedding ceremony in Delhi

There are several wedding planners66 now that operate locally and globally,
with offices in Delhi, and other cities in India and across the world where
there are huge Indian populations. London and cities in US are the chief

locations. As pointed out by Immanuel Castells, networks are indeed the morphology of the culture business as well, noticed most notably in the Indian wedding business. According to Manuel Castells, “the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in process of production, experience, power, and culture. The networking forms of social organisation have existed in other times and spaces, however the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion through the entire social structure” (Castells, 2000:500).

In this quest for fantasy fairy tale wedding, there are a plethora of services that can give you Disney-Landesque themes for the wedding party to choose from. One wedding planner advertises itself as “Welcome to the Era of Well Organised, Memorable, Blissful Designer Weddings. As An Event Management Organisation We Are Very Much Here To Offload All Your Managing Pressure & To Fabricate For You A Pleasant, Memorable, Well Organised & Blissful Ceremony” (www.showmakerz.com): among the many things that they advertise, the themes are, I thought worth listing out:

- Punjabi Village Theme
- Hawaiian Theme
- Arabian Theme
- Theme Of Colors
- Moroccan Theme
- Bollywood Theme
- Theme Of Flowers & Lights
- Ram-Vivah
- Casablanca Theme
- Egyptian Theme & Many More.....

Not only can you choose your fantasy décor/ambience or themes as, they call it from the list that some of the services provide but additional you can now mix and match different traditions and rituals from various regions and ethnicities for the entertainment value that they provide while they still remain a part of the traditional repertoire. One wedding planners services called
sitagita for instances gives an account of possible rituals, associated with marriage, that you can chose from. Here is what the wedding planners offer:

Let’s have a look at some of the fun customs in some of these weddings – something that we can incorporate in any wedding to make it more fun and entertaining!

• In Punjabi weddings, the groom has to watch out for his shoes. In the wink of an eye, the girls from the bride’s side whisk away the shoes and then hold the groom to ransom. The groom is forced to pay in cash or in kind in return for the shoes. It can be a fun game, provided the groom is the sporting kind!

• Among the Gujaratis, the mother-in-law of the groom attempts to catch hold of the groom’s nose during a ritual performed to ward off the evil eye. Perhaps it is to help lighten the relationship between son-in-law and mother-in-law.

• In North India, the groom’s face is hidden by a veil. This is again to ward off the evil eye. However, before the ceremony takes place, someone from the bride’s party lifts the veil to check that the groom is the right one!

• Parsi couples plant a sapling four days before their wedding. Each of the families plants a mango sapling in a pot. The soil is enriched with betel, turmeric and rice. The sapling is planted as priests chant prayers. It is kept at the entrance of the house and watered every day, until eight days after the wedding. Then it is transplanted elsewhere. (http://sitagita.com)

As one can see that the various services and business involved market not just what is been the staple of any particular tradition but also draw from a
cornucopia of cultural elements from outside of India. It is combination of cosmopolitan influences the local that is the weft and woof of global condition that gets played in the way rituals get articulated among the families that I was exploring. The choices are certainly facilitated by the availability of services and conceptions that are marketed and advertised and beamed.

The marketing of culture, tradition, religion, spirituality in a variety of ways has spawned in its wake a self consciousness about what one's cultural roots are. And for the NRIs the self conscious is felt even more strongly, having to contend with a diasporic situation of displacement, however much they may be in touch with home. This can be witnessed by the diasporic Indian involvement with religious right and related cultural activities (see Mathew and Prashad, 2002).

Not all of them may be stridently religious but might find a soft new age version of spirituality. Many scholars have, in fact, described New Age ideas as a modern revival of esoteric and mystical religious traditions rooted in humanity's ancient past, often presented in hybrid, disguised new interpretations. Indeed, the greatest single contributor of philosophical concepts and practices to the American New Age movement has been something neither new nor American. The ancient transformative tradition of Yoga, the theosophical society ideas and the establishment of Vedanta society

67 Methil Renuka writing about “The Great Wedding Bazaar” in India Today magazine says that the wedding planners are savvy “in natty suits, flaunting brimming date diaries and non-negotiable deadlines, sell ideas with slick Powerpoint presentations and expensive publicity folders. An industry with a heterogeneous slew of unique service providers, from card and trousseau designers and artist managers to henna experts, bangle-sellers, even tequila bar specialists and rent-a-limousine entrepreneurs. Together, they make the great Indian wedding factory” and they create fantasy weddings like the Sarin’s in their farmhouse in South Dehi: “Under a moonlit canopy at their Chhattarpur farmhouse, a marriage made in heaven was created. Rope lights soared into the sky on thin eucalyptus trunks. Below, an immaculate expanse of green was readied to grace the fall of designer silk and staccato notes of spear stillets. The party theme: Spanish. Cuisine: Dum Pulkt, Thai, Moroccan, Chinese, Indian, Continental, American. In the construction business, the Sarins were celebrating the marriage of their son Ashim to Nidhi Verma. And this was just the pre-wedding cocktail” (India Today, December 10, 2001).
by Swami Vivekananda to eager American audience has influenced the new age movements, which began in the hippie hey days of the 60s. New Age movement as we know it today began its modern development in the 1960's. Though other trends certainly contributed significantly to this development, including Pagan revivalism and occultism, it was the new influx of Hindu-inspired spiritual traditions that was most responsible for the movement's subsequent development and outlook. Due to changes in the immigration laws in 1965, Asian spiritual teachers (gurus) found entering the U.S. much less of a challenge. During this time, many esteemed Hindu gurus began traveling about America on lecture tours, including Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Bhaktivedanta Swami, Swami Rama, Swami Muktananda, Swami Vishnu-Devananda, and Swami Satchidananda. Consequently, many Hindu religious traditions began to find new and eager adherents in America. Some of these Yoga traditions include the schools of Vedanta, Tantra, Vaishnavism and various Advaitic Hindu teachings. The contributions of these different Yoga schools of thought to New Age thinking are immense.

It is not just the West which is seeking ancient and mystical religions to better their lives. In India too ancient wisdom be it Yoga, meditation, Vaastu, Feng Shui, Vedantic philosophy etc. have found renewed following. This can be seen in the number of books published on, spiritual aspects, religion, the artifacts available for such pursuits, the various services and specialist available. In the book *New Marketing Manifesto*\(^{68}\), John Grant, following Anthony Giddens and David Reisman argues that we are living in an age that is 'tradition hungry' in the sense of 'needing ideas to live by'. The ideas are akin to brands that are provided by corporate and business concerns' (Grant

---

\(^{68}\) In his book, he redefines the nature of brands, showing why old models and scales no longer work and revealing that the key to success today is impacting people's lifestyles (think Starbucks, iPod and eBay). At the heart of the book is the concept of the 'brand molecule' to which new cultural ideas can be constantly added to keep pace with change. Cataloguing 32 classes of idea, Grant presents a practical approach to mixing and matching them within your own market to develop new brand ideas - and new ideas for existing brands.
2000:15). For business houses culture and tradition are one more area that can be sold. The Times of India business house for instance has got into marketing the spiritual and religious needs. Their online shopping features items such as ‘Gold And Silver Plated 3 D Sri Yantra (For Luck, Prosperity And Fame), Shree Ganesh Puja Kit, Garbh Sanskar : Blessings For The New Arrival, Sacred Hindu Chants’, among other things.

Among the families that I looked at some were decidedly more self conscious about ritual observances. In the funeral rites that I observed in the same family there was differing articulation of the same rite. Mr. Khurana’s died while I was doing my field work in Delhi and I happened to witness the various funeral rites, a few months later there was another death in the family Mrs Khurana’s sister-in-law Mrs Pushpa Khanna (brother’s wife) and I happen to attend this funeral too. There was a noticeable difference in the way both the rites were conducted. It was small things that set apart the funerals. Mr. Khurana’s funereal rites were chiefly organised by his elder son, who lives in New York. He came down to India naturally, when he heard his father was in hospital. When the father died there was the usual observances of mourning for the chautha, additionally the Khuranas had a Vedic discourse on life and death by guruji/priest. This discourse is not a necessary part of the funeral rights; usually there is a gathering of near and dear ones after three day period of pollution. Food is served to the relatives and friends and the condolences are offered. Rarely are there any discourses that one sits through that dwells on aspects of death. While many perform rituals without really dwelling on the significance of what and why of ritual, some of the NRI living away from home are very conscious of their identity as Indian and Hindu and make an attempt to intellectualise and understand the meaning behind these rituals. The son, Junior Khurana, told me this in so many words; “people blindly follow what the priest tells you....get so many kilos of ghee, sandalwood and so on, doesn’t matter if the tree in question is rare and expensive , I think the real
import of the ritual is lost in the dos and don’t prescribed by priest. Yes of course one needs priest for the sacrament to be carried out in certain way but we need to get the roots of the rituals”. This self conscious element was missing from the last rites performed in the extended family of the Khuranas, when Mrs Pushpa Khanna died there were the last rites performed followed by chautha where there were no additional strapping to the ritual.

Not so incidental is the fact that Mrs Khanna was married to very middle class small entrepreneur Punjabi man. The family only lately could be considered middle class unlike the Khuranas, whose son lives abroad and are in well do to professions and have the genteel manners and bearing of the well exposed cosmopolitan and whose interest in his traditions and roots is from sense of understanding the knowledge and wisdom of the traditions and samskaras. And as we pointed out earlier, the marketing of religion and tradition and culture has made it far more accessible. The media is the other molecule, to use Grants analogy that builds on the additional molecule added by the enterprise of corporations and business outfits.

One of the most noticeable things about funereal rites, from my fieldwork observations and information, is that the period of mourning, which traditionally lasted 10 days or 13 days has been shortened; often to four days. Time and distance have been given as the two main reasons for truncated versions of the last rites. With families spread across geographic regions and nations, often practices that are convenient and readily amenable are adopted. Conveniences of funeral home that offer embalming and decoration of the body – flowers, casket etc, cremation (electrical), and a place for congregation have streamlined the funereal rites, particularly in the US, where the traditional American funeral houses have added features that would attract the Hindu populations. In India, funeral homes are yet to replace the role of
traditional specialist such as barber and so on at funeral occasions, but many have taken to the convenience of shortening the length of funeral rites and mourning period. Especially, where families are spread over geographical spaces that are distant and time is a constraint. Among certain castes in south India mostly among the Dalits and certain communities of Shudras, it is customary to bury the dead, but in the fieldwork it was noticed that the few low caste persons that I have interacted and interviewed had cremated their dead.

5.5 Media and Bollywood Inspired Spectacles of Tradition

A Delhi based Jat family that I spoke to revealed that they were surprised that their son, who is returning from a long stint in the US, wants ‘a monsoon wedding’. The son Vikrant was getting married to a white American girl. When the boy announced to the parents his intention of getting married to his American girlfriend, the parents Mr Harish and his wife Sadhna Singh proposed a simple wedding (Arya Samaj style) that would suit the possibly busy and cosmopolitan couple. Mrs Sadhana Singh, the mother of the groom told me “I thought they would insist that they don’t want all the tamasha of elaborate and ritualistic wedding. In any case, among our families we have always been not too religious and observed the most basic rituals and in a rather perfunctory way. She added that her father who was involved in the Indian Independent struggle was a ‘modernist’ who did not like the superstitious traditions and rituals, which according to him were a waste of money and time’. “We grow up in some way as being educated, progressive....you can say modern”. So she was partly surprised that her son

69 The film Monsoon Wedding was directed by the noted film director Mira Nair. The film saw a considerable success both in India and few countries abroad. The film is about a wedding in an upper middle class Punjabi family that is based in Delhi. It showcases the celebratory aspects and family politics involved around a wedding.
wanted, as he put it, “a monsoon wedding”, In a conversation with the son, Vikrant, it came to be that ‘it is his American fiancée who wanted a fun ‘Indian wedding’, complete with mehendi, ladies sangeet and Bollywood dances and songs that are choreographed. Vikrant was not averse to it either, as it would really showcase Indian culture and family ‘togetherness’ to his American friends, some of who were visiting India for the marriage.

This is not the first time that Bollywood has inspired wedding celebrations. Bollywood has been fairly emulatory in terms of sartorial sense and such other fashion related lifestyle choices. However, lately there are more movies and TV soap operas that have inspired people to go for ceremonies, celebrations and rituals that were not as popular. In 1994, when the movie Hum Aapke Hain Koun (HAHK) was released, it was big hit. Made on a budget of around Rs.60 million, it went on to collect over Rs.650 million in India and over Rs.150 million overseas.(Source: http://www.boxofficeindia.com ) . The film is a story of two Indian families and the relationships between them.

The film celebrates Indian culture using modern production values. It is noted for its lavish depictions of North Indian wedding ceremonies. Its popular soundtrack, included an unusually large number of songs, 14 to be precise. The movie is notoriously long with hardly any plot according to many critics. It essentially revolved around the wedding in a joint family and the attendant rituals. For some, it was three hour long wedding video. The depiction of the wedding is an idealisation of the institution of perfect family, a rich household and luxurious décor. The idealised weddings was beyond the means of most ordinary people, but the aspiration and desire was created, some aspects of the movie could be emulated at least.

It is even said that the audience dressed in their own wedding clothes to attend the screening of the Hum Aapke Hain Koun....in order to
participate in expensive rituals of the wedding and other events in the film. HAHK showed all the rituals of a north Indian wedding. Some such rituals, which people can not afford today and had dropped, were once again revived as result of watching the film. The ritual of women from bride’s party stealing the shoes of the men from the grooms party in order to sell them back were said to have repopularised by the film. The green outfits worn by the heroine (Madhuri Dixit) for this sequence was much copied and the catchy song the heroine sang became a standard wedding tune. Other costumes worn in HAHK were much copied by tailors in India and the diaspora as they allowed for further emulation of the possibilities offered in film (Dwyer, 2004:53)

Films like HAHK and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ released soon after HAHK) were two major hits in film industry that brought the values and virtues of family and marriage (Uberoi, 2001) to an audience that was global. DDLJ filmed in England/ London, was one of the first Bollywood films to feature Indians living outside India, thus encompassing the narrative of the diasporic Indian. These two movies were break away from the earlier movies of blood and gore of the angry-young-man days of Amitabh Bacchan

Nikhat Kazmi, a film critic for The Times of India comments that the film HAHK is an emerging trend, a move away from ‘blood and gore to the ‘uplifting themes of family, the nation and love’, In an interview with Nasreen Munni Kabir, published in her book Talking Films (2000), Javed Akhtar, noted screenplay writer and lyricist describes the success of movies such as the ‘family films’ as :"onslaught of consumerism" that in the 1990s "brought Indian society to the point where we are feeling slightly lost. We talk of a cultural invasion, an excess of Westernisation, loss of family values ... But on the other hand, what's the alternative? Do I go back to the village? Western culture and glitter are very attractive. So Maine Pyar Kiya (I Love Someone,
1989] and Hum Aapke Hain Koun...! (1994) offer the solution: a happy marriage between the two worlds. I can have everything offered by modernisation and still hold on to family values and tradition”.

HAHK indeed is an endorsement of the affluence of upper middle class families. As Barucha (1995) has pointed out and as Uberoi writes “the homes are veritable parade of fetishised middle class status symbols; in homes, cars, children’s toys clothes...the ‘tasteful’ marriage decorations etc. The film also seamlessly blends haut bourgeois lifestyle with religiosity and traditionalism in rituals — thereby legitimizing affluence as a value in itself...accepted without guilt and with no indication — in the film narrative or in the audience reactions — that affluence might be corrupting or ill gained, as was so often the case in the Hindi movies of an earlier era, whereby poverty signaled virtue and wealth spiritual depravity”(Uberoi, 2001).

Affluence of upper middle class mixed with traditionalism and ritual observances seem to be the stuff of many rituals and weddings and ceremonies that I witnessed. As mentioned earlier, in my fieldwork, the marriage rituals were more noticeably celebratory and greater amount of wealth and emotions were invested in it. As marriage for Indian families is one of the most important life-changing events, as such a great deal of discussion centred around wedding ceremonies and rituals in our account, and that is true of in this section as well, where the discussion is on the media mediated and inspired ceremonies and celebrations.

The elaborate detail showcasing of rituals mainly wedding related rituals has given audiences a new benchmark and aspirations. As one young, to be married bride, said to me “I like watching Hindi movies for inspiration and ideas for my wedding. “They’re also known for the amazing, highly
choreographed song and dance numbers. My mom and I have spent many Saturday afternoons catching up with the newest Bollywood flick. Another plus is that Bollywood movies almost always feature a wedding or two, so they provide great bridal wear/jewelry eye candy”. She wanted a choreographed dance and song sequence for her wedding. As part of her preparation she and her mother religiously caught up with Hindi films and some of them had to be watched again and again. It is not only the Hindi films that are inspirations for style, but the elaboration of regional ethnic habitations and rituals etc are highlighted in soap operas, especially Ekta Kapoor serials. One family member told me that now “everyone wants to look like either some Ekta Kapoor’s TV actress or Bollywood actress at weddings, or for that matter at any festive occasions”

Among the diasporic Indians the Hindi films or for that matter films have been a source of contact with India. They catalogued life in India, idyllic as it may seem. But they never become part of wedding rituals. True, there was film music played by bands. But it never really became a way of the family’s participation by reenacting song and dance sequences from movies. But things changed when the two blockbusters HAHK and DDLJ became big hits among the young adults of immigrants. “Blockbusters such as Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge and Hum Aapke Hain Koun brought home the synergy of the decadent, festive splendour of North Indian weddings and the popular song-and-dance sequences. This coincided with the coming of age of the offspring of the migrants in the '60s and '70s, and the big-screen bonanzas became their most natural inspiration” (BhaUacharya and Gupta, 2007).

70 I happened to go to a Tamil association celebration of Pongal where the Tamil community of greater Chicago had put up a series of variety shows. Many programme featured by the community were all Tamil Film inspired. I came across a family that completely lived, breathed and ate Tamil films. They naturally wanted that their daughter should be decked like one of the heroines from a Tamil film.
It is this generation who are already fed on the kitsch and fun elements of music videos and postmodern mixes and pastiche that found the new generation movies echoing the global idiom with their sophistication in production, very different from the films of their parent generation. The acknowledgement of Bollywood in some ways carved out a boundary between them (the desi71) and others in America. In my field work I found that a lot of teenagers who might shun things that they associate with their parents were open to Bollywood music which is acceptable among the fellow desi teenagers. Once it got peer acceptance it acquired a coolness quotient. It is this generation which wanted marriage to be fun celebration, not somber affairs. North weddings, in particular Punjabi weddings had the fun elements; barathis dancing along with processions and big ladies sangeet. But for the younger generations these elements were relics from their parent’s generation. The second generation, professional Indian American, wanted their weddings to be more than this. As it was told to me by a professional from Skokie: “fun like some of my American friends but with more pomp, colour, vibrancy … that is so Indian. I wanted to show them the Indian customs”. As said earlier this need coincided with the release of HAHK and DDLJ. “Now Bollywood has influenced people into having extra ceremonies, and extra festivities are added into the culture now. Typically, where there would've been only one or two ceremonies, now if they see that it existed in our culture years and years ago (through Bollywood movies), they want to bring it back. Where in the past an arriving baraat (groom's wedding procession) may have danced to a few Bollywood tunes, now Bollywood seems integral to everything, from makeup, jewelry and decor to the cut of the wedding lehengas (bridal skirts) ” (ibid).

71 Incidentally the word ‘desi’ for South Asian Immigrants is coinage by the second generation Indian American.
The inclusion of certain kind of music in Bollywood is included in real life situation of weddings. These are played in real life by the bands that lead the groom’s procession and at the sangeet at the wedding. Weddings are one of the few occasions that even traditional families allow boys and girls to dance together. Dancing now to choreographed music in family settings has become *de rigueur* in many weddings. But the choreographed dancing, involving bride and groom family, according to one of my informants, (Naina Mehta who runs a small wedding planning outfit in Chicago) is very popular among the Punjabis and especially among the Punjabis settled in UK. She says “they had their choreographers, dhol players, MC and DJ much easily available. Of course people wanted to have wedding their cousins had in London or Birmingham”. The middle class Indians now invite expensive DJs who come from UK.

At weddings in Delhi that want to let know how well-connected the families are, the guest invited are significant. At one time in Delhi the guest list might have include some important public figure like a minister or a politician or some celebrity. But lately if the performer invited is a Bollywood actor then you have really made it big, as someone who can afford a Bollywood dancer. Most people can not afford big stars like Sharukh Khan to perform at their wedding, who was reportedly paid 1.5 crore. However, starlets and item girls also strike it big in this business. For them, weddings and other shows are their main source of sustenance. It was customary in parts of north India to have wedding entertainment much like stag party where a ‘dancing girl was invited. That kind of thing in urban India would be considered C grade. The

---

72 “Telly actors like Tina Hussein are also in the list of wedding performers and get jiggy with it for around 4 lakh, while item girls like Payal Rohatgi, Sanobar Kabir and *Kaanta Laaga* girl Shefali Zariwala charge around Rs 2-3 lakh, according to sources. Zariwala says, “I have danced to *Kaanta Lagaa* at sangeet ceremonies and weddings. Weddings are happy occasions and I like being part of their happiness.”
girl were considered nothing short of being prostitutes. In fact, one of the older gentleman who was lamenting about the Bollywoodisation of weddings said “what is the difference between the item girls from Bollywood or the nachnewali (dancing girl)” ? The difference is in the acceptability that show-business has reached in the mindsets of middle and upper middle class families. A stodgy middle class family would shun the idea of their girls getting into modeling, acting and such related careers which were considered undignified and pedestrian. With more and more so called respectable families (read professional parents, ‘convent educated girls’), some of the misgivings are falling by the way side. The acceptability has also been spearheaded by the rich NRI who popularised the trend of paying Bollywood actors dancers to perform for the wedding.

Now weddings have moved from one day events to mega parties, where new grounds are constantly being explored to entertain the guest and showcase that money can just about buy everything, a simulated ‘Ram Vivah’ or a staged palace. Earlier, weddings used to rely on recorded tapes and CDs that would play over the speakers but now professional Disc Jockeys who are also Master of Ceremony, manage the whole show. Now, “we have DJs, MCs, entertainers, belly dancers, party motivators, Bhangra dancers, big screens,

\[73\] Flamenco dancers, up to Rs 1 lakh  
Belly dancers, Rs 45,000-65,000  
Ballet dancers, Rs 40,000-60,000  
Caricaturists, Rs 25,000  
Face painters, Rs 10,000  
Rough estimate for an evening performance, according to the reporters from India Today. Below is photograph of flamenco dancer from Spain, for a Delhi wedding from the cover story on Indian wedding from the magazine India Today.
slide shows, strobe lights, projectors and plasma TVs”, says Vaishali Sawant of Rose Events.

Some of the inputs clearly have been popularised by the Indian Diaspora in the West and soon seem to have the contagion effect of being followed here. We are not proposing here that cultural artifacts and concepts travel in a linear fashion, from point A to B. The world is indeed global and spherical and many items of consumption that we have been mentioning are simultaneous. True there is a time lag, much less however than earlier decade. The lag can be explained not just in terms of their travel time in the literal sense, but more in terms when does a certain practice become ready for emulation or acceptance. In purely commonsensical as well as in the much accepted proposition of relative deprivation and consequent referencing to any group which appears well-off, we can say that when ideas come from the richer relatives there is propensity for the poorer cousins to want to impress them when they get a chance.

There has been much that was talked about how with increasing globalisation there is simultaneous viewing of media images and ideas that creates both the

(Source: *India Today*, Dec 10, 2001)

74 I tried to find when some of these introductions - DJs, MCs, laser shows, Bollywood dancers made their way into the Delhi wedding scene. I talked to a few wedding planners who did not have any precise sense of when it all started. But most say that it is around mid 1990s.
global and traditional. While that is very much in place, I would also like to add that the traditional does not always originate in the local contexts sometimes. The diasporic visiting Indians seem to be the agents of such revisitation of local traditions which have acquired global trajectories. Bhangra for instance, has become ‘cool’ when it reached a certain level of hipness in underground circles soon to become a staple as club music. The very bhangra riffs or ragamuffin elements are then introduced by the film industry. A lot of young people who consume the gangsta-look bangra will have no reference point or context to identity politics and the marginalisation which have spurned these underground movements and they then have been appropriated by the record companies. The revisited bhangra that young India and the audiences in general is exposed to do not perhaps realise that the bhangra is revisiting larger India not from Bhatinda but via London or New York or elsewhere.

The local or traditional, (we have been using the word local and traditional in the same breath) to indicate not only the place of origin but also what has been largely in practice from a particular place. To take the example of bhangra again; it is both local and traditional, but when examined, the trajectory of different contexts that it has traveled in the diasporas, one realises that it is invested with agencies that are peculiar to its contexts. Thus, something seemingly traditional and local may have global trajectories. In that sense while Bollywood might have certain significance in Indian wedding context and it is the same Bollywood and media mediated rituals that are marketed, perhaps, differently elsewhere where the Indian diaspora is. In our next chapter, we are going to look at the Indians in Chicago who now are more or less situated in contexts where they can access all those things that are required for ritual performances.