

**Culinary Culture of the Indian Diaspora: A Study of
Women and their identity in the United States of America**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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BY

SINORITA MAZUMDER



UGC CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF INDIAN DIASPORA

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD-500046 (INDIA)

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DECLARATION

Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora

University of Hyderabad

I, Sinorita Mazumder hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled, “**Culinary Culture of the Indian Diaspora: A Study of Women and their identity in the United States of America**” is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Ajailiu Niumai, Head, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy(CSSEIP) University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad**, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Indian Diaspora, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any other University. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be uploaded in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Part of this thesis has been:

A. Research papers published in the following publications.

1. “Eating Culture: Reading Food in Indian American Literature” has been accepted for publication in International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS) ISSN (Print) - 2519-7908.
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Prof. Ajailiu Niumai
Research Supervisor

Dr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo
Head, Centre for the Study of
Indian Diaspora

Prof. Y A Sudhakar Reddy
Dean, School of Social
Sciences

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I dedicate this thesis to my family

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Introduction

The term 'Diaspora' has gained multitudes of definition and clarification when it comes under the sphere of the study of the Indian Diaspora. The meaning and definition of Diaspora has gradually evolved and conceptualized with the various definitions coming up. At the initial phase, when Diaspora was defined, it concentrated more on the Diasporic societies, which was restricted only to the European Diasporic communities such as Jewish Diaspora. Nevertheless, the term gradually evolved and went through multiple alterations.

The Diaspora has been characterized with certain parameters that have ultimately succeeded in recognizing the clan of diaspora. The diaspora is "a collective term applied to a group of people who have faced the traumatic separation from their homelands and dispersal to some other countries". The idea of the homeland has been expanded by the diaspora, in search of trade, work or other "colonial ambitions" (Brown 2006), with a persisting idea or a myth about the homeland. The Diaspora, again, is often characterized by a strong urge to return to their homelands, with a sense of solidarity with members of other countries.

According to Brown (2006), the Diaspora has been categorized into three historical ages according to the emergence of the Diaspora-

- The Classical

- The (early) modern
- The late (advanced) modern

Brown (2006) also states that migration in India dates back to the times when Buddhist pilgrims of ancient India who travelled across Central and Eastern Asia. This course of migration has conceptualized the term 'Diaspora'. The 'Indian Diaspora' has grown out of two very crucial dimensions in the history of capital. The first movement of capitalism produced the migration of indentured labourers to the colonies situated in South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana, and the like for the large scale production of sugar, rubber and tin for the European markets; specifically the British markets. The second movement of human population from India was a post 1960's phenomenon to the metropolitan centres of the former empire as well as the New World and Australia.

The second wave of migration distinguished themselves from the early mass of population those migrated in the early period as labourers and connected to plantation culture. The new Diaspora; who had settled in the United States, Britain and Australia had unbroken contact with the homeland. The old Diaspora was different from the new global Diaspora; as the old Diaspora have been characterized as not at all having any attachment to their homeland, as they were not allowed to travel overseas to reach their homeland.(Brown, 2006). With this notion in mind, I would like to quote Diana Brydon (2004, 8), where she says,

“Whereas older notions of diaspora implied the persistence of a homeland through the scattering of peoples, newer notions stress transnational circulations, multidirectional flows, and the capacity to occupy multiple locations”.

In my research thesis, I would like to introduce the new Diaspora and their marginalized identities with reference to their cultural traits. The Indian Diaspora craves for their lost authentic identity and the standards that have been set for them. Among many of these parameters, food is one such factor that seems to step out as one of the many important factors enlivening the sentiments of the Diaspora.

One of the many reasons that I have chosen food as my research topic is, food is a motivating factor that connects the Diaspora with the homeland. It enlivens the urge to connect with the homeland. Food defines the social hierarchies and acts as a driving force behind the people's actions. The social hierarchies prevalent in the Indian society also act as a determining factor to shape the culinary rituals in the Indian society. In this context, it would be apt to refer to Srinivas (1952), when he referred to the Harijan castes in Mysore who do not accept cooked food and drinking water from the Brahmins. However, most of the Brahmins or the twice born castes have a problem to accept food or water from the lower castes. M.N. Srinivas in his book, *India: Social Structure* (1980) has also mentioned that the shadow of the Dalits would pollute the upper castes and they require a purification to cleanse themselves. G.S. Ghurye in his book, *Caste and Race in India* (1969), also elaborates on the Indian caste system and the food practices. He also asserts that the 'twice born' castes or the Brahmins cannot take any kind of food, but can take water from other castes. Food is also divided into two groups, *Kacchcha* (raw) food and *pakka* (cooked) food. The dominant rule that is followed within the social hierarchy is that a man must not accept any food that is cooked by any man of any other caste. But all the other castes can accept food from the Brahmins. Srinivas (1980) has also mentioned that the concept of *kacchcha* and *pakka* food is not uniform in all the parts of India. Though this social stratification is prevalent in India, the situation is different in the Diaspora. It is believed that Indians carry their

caste baggage when they migrate, but the food hierarchical system is generally not followed by the Indians in the Diaspora. As I have discussed that the social hierarchical status also determines the food practices, the situation differs in the Diaspora. The people in the Diaspora often stick on to the rituals observed while eating; that I have discussed in one of my later chapters, but the concept of caste does not gain prominence in the Diaspora. With the elaboration of the *kacchcha* food and the *Pakka* food, the concept does not find importance in the Diaspora. Globalization has moulded the Diaspora to come up with a new identity, where they can accept the new country and it's people adhering on to some of the rituals and traditional beliefs of the Indian society, though ignoring some of the facets of the caste system prevalent in India. It has also been observed in my study that the first generation Indian migrants adhere to the traditional beliefs and rituals, while their children bear a different identity and thoughts. The second generation Indians do not identify themselves as Indians, and subsequently do not tend to follow the traditional customs observed by their parents. According to Kumar (2012, 2), the caste system has undergone a massive change in the Diaspora. He asserted that "in the context of the complex nature of the Indian diasporic life, *jati*¹ as an operational unit of caste has not survived". The "caste behavior in South Asia is regulated by two important factors- exchange of cooked food and exchange of bodily fluids." (Kumar 2012, 6) Though these two factors have their own significances in different social formations to display their own social status', the typical structure is often disintegrated in the Diaspora. According to my understanding and observation, it has been concluded that there has been major changes in the caste behavior. Though some surveys have reported that two-thirds of the members of Dalits, said they have faced harassment

¹ A caste or subcaste

due to their caste. Some have also faced physical assault as well as discrimination in education². The caste consciousness is embedded within the traditional Indian society and with the present generation, caste is not about strictly maintaining “one’s caste endogamy”. (Kumar 2012, 11)

Food serves as one of the very important cultural representations of any community. I would like to draw the reference of Terry Eagleton (1998, 204) when he summarizes the properties of food by saying, “If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food- it is endlessly interpretable- materialized emotion”. Food offers the memory of a lost homeland; it associates itself with the lost land of origin. Food also associates itself with the very relevant term nostalgia, where the land left behind is equated with the food that has been left behind and that can never be recovered. Food culture forms an indispensable part of the culture as art, music and dance does.

Indians; from the ancient times, have been observed to be very particular about their culinary habits. This involves food preparation, serving of food, the religious taboos and certain rules associated with it and with the myths of eating. As Chitrita Bannerjee (2007) has spotted out in one of her books entitled *Eating India*, the art of eating Indian food is never observed in a foreign land. Being a Bengali, she feels herself tied to the nostalgia of the authentic Bengali cuisine that she had savored in her early days in Calcutta and the art of serving and eating the meal consecutively. Residing in a foreign land; away from her home, where she serves a lavish Bengali platter to her friends, they fail to understand the order in which they should have been eating the palate; and the author is left disappointed. With reference to the rules and rituals observed while preparing food and eating it, Indians have been observed to enumerate millions

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/04/25/605030018/when-caste-discrimination-comes-to-the-united-states>

of them. Savoring food has been highly interlinked with the religious rituals. Each recipe of a dish comes handy with a history of its own.

People can migrate to procure food. History has been a witness to some of the major migration that has happened across borders; and all of these have been the outcomes for procurement of food for self and family. According to Kershen (2017), in the 1840's the Irish potato famine drove thousands of the population across the Atlantic and Irish Channels. She also mentions that between July and October (1974), about two million people walked for about a hundred miles to procure food. However, the past decades only figure out that the mass migration of thousands of population across the borders is only because of food and its scarcity.

Food studies have formed an important part in anthropological as well as sociological studies. Food can be used to create racist warfare and distinguish class, race and ethnicity. Much of the literature dealing with food repeatedly insists on a discussion on the issues of memory. Much of the anthropological studies have been done by Sutton (2001) and Counihan (2004), where their works have focused on food and memory. Holtzman (2006, 362) says that "though food and memory demand a cross-disciplinary approach", notions of food have been markers of nostalgia and memory for the immigrant communities. Therefore, when Mannur (2004) also mentions her eternal love for Tuna fish, she not only expresses her love for "the brine infused marine edible," but also reminisces her childhood days, when her mother used to buy her tuna sandwiches for lunch. It also manifests on the issues of memory, identity (cultural identity to be more specific), and newly invented traditions playing a major role in nationalism and consumer capitalism. Food forms a locus of constructing identity. The power of food is to cover up the class issues under the disguise of "personal preference" and "matters of taste". While studying the myriad dimensions of food and its studies, anthropologists have said that food is about "commensuality-eating to

make friends- and competition-eating to make enemies” (Sutton, 2001). While we speak of class issues, the class distinction made by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), is of utmost importance. He argues that social classes can distinguish themselves only at mealtimes.

“The art of eating and drinking remains one of the few areas in which the working class explicitly challenges the legitimate art of living. In the face of the new ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimness, which is most recognized at the highest levels of the social hierarchy, peasants and especially industrial workers maintain an ethic of convivial indulgence.” (Bourdieu 1984, 179)

Food also plays the role of a boundary marker and a marker of ethnicity, a form of identity formation, whether it is “regional, national, ethnic, class or gender based.” In the contemporary U.S context, food is also shown to define assimilation. The study of food can be categorized into some more possible dimensions. The taste for certain food reflect social and cultural pattern and vice-versa, the relationship between food and power, the ceremonial uses of food in religion, development of table etiquettes and the essential symbolic meaning of food. Though, I have pointed out some of the very salient features of food studies and their objectives, my research would dwell on some of the points elaborated below.

Food and consumption form an interminable link between themselves, “the reality of human existence”. Food is the essence of humanity, because without a morsel of food and a glass of water, the existence of life would be eradicated. For us, eating is just not a biological process; it bears a vast sociological and cultural significance. Eating and its related processes has its own histories, the techniques employed to cook it, prepare, process, serve the food, the customized table manners to consume the food and the like, are social and cultural variables.

Music is a very lively example for enlivening human senses; and food does the same for humans. In the same order, food and music are expected to arouse different types of reaction in different cultures and cultures vary according to the type of society, one belongs to. The word ‘cuisine’ is borrowed from the French language which means ‘kitchen’ and other things. But in general terms, cuisine just not means kitchen, but cooking and food. Cuisine also has a national demarcation. We, in general terms, use Chinese cuisine, Indian cuisine, Thai cuisine, Mughlai cuisine (which is influenced by Central Asian cuisine) and the like. Jean-Francois Revel (1982) thinks that cuisines are demarcated within various cultures and regions because of the differences in the availability of ingredients for the cuisine. These kinds of cuisine and their preparations had originated within their own societies representing their own societies and their own culture. To be clearer, a national cuisine is just not prepared with the availability of ingredients in the country, but the ingredients are varied due to the incorporation of other cultures in their own nation. The tastes of the particular national cuisine also differ due to the climatic conditions of the country.

“[A] cuisine requires a population that eats that cuisine with sufficient frequency to consider themselves expert on it. They all believe, and care that they believe, that they know what it consists of, how it is made, and how it should taste. In short, a genuine cuisine has common social roots; it is the food of a community albeit often a very large community.” (Mintz; 1996, 96)

This is mainly done by the foods that they consume. The tastes also vary according to the income levels of the people in the society. As for defining tastes of food, some very significant habits and traits constitute together to define a class of tastes and habits among different classes in the society. For eg: - The Greeks established a vital role of wine in their cuisine. Many aspects of our

modern food culture can be traced back to the ancient Greek food culture. The Greek diet was based on olive oil, bread and wine. Wine was served to the Gods, which played a pivotal role in religious ceremonies and was also included in prayer rituals.³ This example served one to establish the food habits of the Greeks. Similarly, modern men also have some pre-determined steps to ensure their own food habits which, again, differ in different communities. For a fine example, we can present the diet of people in the United States of America (USA), where the people prefer more of the junk food like French fries, burgers, pizzas, sour dough and the like. However, there are health conscious Americans who convert themselves to veganism and there are vegan restaurants in every cities across the USA. Some Americans opt for healthy food nowadays. In the USA, slim people are considered as fit and healthy who belong to the upper class whereas people with more weight are perceived to be from the lower class.⁴

1.1 Food and memory

Food; as defined in realist terms can be defined as something that living beings consume in order to acquire energy. Though food can be defined in very realistic terms; it also comes along with some of its multidimensional facets - social, psychological, physiological and symbolic dimensions; to name a few (Holtzman 2006, 362). On the other hand, memory can be defined as some literal forms of remembering. Food studies forms a vast arena to study the complexities of memory. In this reference, memory can be defined as an experience or “meaning in reference to the past.” While we start studying the fact about food and memory, a potential question would always come up in a researcher’s mind as to why food is considered as a tool to evoke memories

³ <https://alwaysravenous.com/food-and-wine-in-ancient-greece/>

⁴ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265215#BMI-exaggerates-thinness-in-short-people-and-fatness-in-tall-people>

of the past. The simple answer to this would be the “sensuality of eating transmits powerful mnemonic cues, principally through smell and tastes.”

“Every man carries within him a world which is composed of all that he has seen and loved, and to which he constantly returns, even when he is travelling through, and seems to be living in, some different world”. (Chateaubriand, in Kahn 1993, xvii)

The above lines finely decipher the migrants’ experience of leaving the homeland and its sweet smells and tastes. Memory is associated with the prominent issues of identity, gender, class and ethnicity. The transnational identities have put the issue of nostalgia in place. At this juncture, I would like to draw the reference given by Sutton (2001) in his book, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* where he widely discusses the various facets of memory. He discusses on how food becomes a compelling medium of memory. The experience of ethnic food comes handy with the recollection of lost memories, and evoking nostalgic memories of the past. Therefore, it has been repeatedly proved, that food acts as a vehicle for revisiting memories. After migration, one is discarded of his/her homeland. The only thing left with them is the memory of the home; left long behind. The feeling of displacement and dislocation urges the migrants to cling to their memories and re-visit their pasts. The migrant feels the desire to embrace their past, when they are geographically displaced. They try to relate to these memories with some much-highlighted factors, which also form a part of their formed identity in the Diaspora. Among the other related factors, the culinary idiom plays a crucial part in reflecting the lost memories of the past and reconnect with home. The desire to remember home by recreating culinary memories cannot be understood as reflecting nostalgic attitudes only. “Studying a culinary narrative also gives a different dimension of defining national identity”

(Mannur, 2004). Nostalgia, which is more often understood as a cultural practice, “can also be understood as critical praxis.”

Some smells ignite the memories left behind in the kitchen in the homelands. For immigrants who live out of their homelands, food plays a crucial role in revisiting the memories of the past. Food frequently accompanies people in their travels across the borders in the world. This revitalizes the memories from home, and consequently, creates an identity for the migrants. Food might be analyzed as a cultural site; and is very helpful in understanding the culture of the migrant and their experiences of migration, displacement and fragmentation. The connection with the family through food does occur in tangible ways as well. With the concept of ‘glocalization’ arising; the availability of Indian products required in the kitchens in the markets of U.K or U.S.A, the scope of shopping and cooking those items becomes easier. Niumai (2021, 114) in her article *Manipur’s Diaspora in the United States: Mapping Cultural and Development Ties with Homeland* argued that, “The Diaspora’s cravings for ethnic food help the Asian restaurants, entrepreneurs and Asian grocery stores to garner the trust of the Indian people and strengthen their food business. In a nutshell, glocalization helps in connecting with the local Indian consumers on an emotional level and also leverage its global position”. This, in process, paves a way for the migrants to get closer to their homeland, thereby triggering memories. This is a recurring theme in the studies of Diaspora or expatriate populations. The emphasis, here, is on the experience of displacement. The longing for the smell and taste of a lost homeland is evoked with the taste and smell of food; among the immigrants. Mankekar (2002), points out that Indian immigrant customers; do not just go to ethnic markets in Bay Area; just to buy groceries, but they also look out for representations of their homeland. The gastronomic memory becomes the core for the creation of memory for the homelands, “ranging from the sensory clues the shops

evoke, the cultural mnemonics of the commodities purchased, and how the goods acquired allow for the practices that foster historically validated forms of identity”. (Mankekar, 2002) It is this memory that leads to the emotional affect described in the passage: simultaneous laughing and crying, and then a sense of soothingness, suggesting the evocation of other memories. (Sutton, 2001). The literature dealing with food is rich with nostalgia. As stated by Appadurai (1996,78), “the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia” and “the consumer need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss that he or she has never suffered.” Another important facet to be noticed within the dietary habits of the immigrants is the dietary changes that are noticed among them. The food and the dietary changes, notable among the Diaspora serve as a lens to read the present through the past.

1.2 Cultural symbolism of food

Joseph Rykwet (1991) states that cooking; which is considered as one of the earliest forms of taming fire, is the origin of culture. “Hearths and middens, kitchen-refuse heaps, are some of the earliest traces of human habitation- the very notion of home seems to have grown around the hearth.” (Rykwet 1991, 51)

“Home is where the hearth is” - A famous proverb intensifying the meaning of home which has a thorough connection with food and consequently the hearth which signifies the home. The immigrants connect the food with their homeland, rather the lost homeland. The lost homeland, for the immigrants becomes an issue of the past, and therefore, the search for the authentic food continues in their host country. The search for an authentic food is the reversal of time. This is the reason that the Diaspora, turns to run into the past. This is exactly why the migrants invest so much time, energy and money only on the rhythms of eating. It is one amongst many other social

factors that connects the Diaspora with their culture. As mentioned by Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz (1997, 85), “Food, is a reliable way to approach people and its cultures.”

As we have seen, food plays a determining role in the culture of a race. Here, I would like to concentrate on the concept of culture, so that we can further understand the connection of food with the culture of the Diaspora. Culture, as has been defined, primarily by E.B. Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871, 1), suggests, “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.

People in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century believed in the above argument placed by E.B. Tylor. The things and events that comprise culture have their own existence, in space and time-

1. Within human organisms; i.e; concepts, beliefs, emotions and attitudes.
2. Within processes of social interaction among human beings.
3. Within material objects.

As stated by many anthropologists, the nature of man is to be understood and to understand culture. Culture is always associated with the society in which a man resides. Societies differ and so does the culture of the human being. Culture does not move or change, but there are certain factors which determine the culture of a society, which varies from one society to the other. As Boas mentions (1928, 236), “the forces that bring about the changes are active in the individuals composing the social group, not in the abstract culture”.

In some other definitions by Radcliffe-Brown, (1940) culture is mentioned as interactive and not the people who abide by the cultural norms made by the society. Niumai in Sahoo (2021, 114)

also affirms that, “For the Diaspora, food forms an indispensable part of mapping cultural ties with their homeland and asserts their cultural identity”.

When we stop and think about the word culture, many images keep on flashing in our minds. We would probably think about the modes of thinking, feeling, behavior, norms, customs and traditions of the social group to which one belongs. After determining the various factors of culture and what culture comprises of, we can easily conclude that food is one form of culture that brings about the cultural representations of a community. While drawing back to the studies made by Claude Levi Strauss, (1963) he observed food to be a system of communication. In the context of theoretical framework, I have used Levi Strauss’ theory of food as a system of communication (language and culture) to understand Indian Diaspora women food bloggers in the USA. He made the study of food; and transforms itself from being mundane to a very interesting topic. Claude Levi Strauss (1963) realized that food can be conceived as a language that expresses social structure and cultural systems of the society. He asserts that food “must not only be good to eat, but also good to think (with)” (1963, 89). He further developed the idea of the connection between food and culture by illuminating it with the example of the roasted and the boiled food. He says that roasted food is directly exposed to fire; whereas boiled food has double mediation, by the water in which it is boiled. In this context, he said that roasted food is on the side of nature, whereas boiled food possesses mediation; i.e water, thereby, symbolically adding boiled food under the category of culture. He also thinks how food performs its communicative function and relates it with the surrounding society.

Studies on food were conducted, which went beyond something nutritious and physiological. Cuisines are believed to be a “whole cultural package”. They are supposed to shape social relations and connect the past with the present and future. ‘Indigenization’- a process that “brings

in, adapts, then subsumes” outside culinary influences. This new process has been used to study the culinary culture and practices. The term ‘indigenization’ has been used by Fernandez (2003) to clarify the fact that cuisines; which has been categorized as indigenous; face changes due to many factors, with migration (the primary branch of our study), other natural calamities which also adds to the list.

Again as stated by Wenying Xu (2007, 2) “Food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structure people’s identities and their concept of others”.

As Mary Douglas (Douglas 1973, 41) has briefly stated, in one of her essays entitled, *Deciphering a Meal*, the social categorization of meals is done in accordance with the structure and cultural pattern of the family. “A spoon or a saucer is for stirring, not sucking. Meals require a table, a seating order, restriction on movement and on alternative occupations. There is no question of knitting during a meal. Even at Sunday breakfast, reaching for the newspaper is a signal that the meal is over”.

1.3 Food and identity

“Food is our common ground, a universal experience.” - James Beard⁵

While talking about identity, let us concentrate primarily on the term identity and its context in the era of globalization. “The old identities that had formed earlier are vigorously on the verge of breaking up and transforming themselves into new identities. The changes in identities which have been widely observed are also responsible for the wider process of changes in the society”. The question of changes in identity is noticeable in the Diaspora.

⁵ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/james_beard_140985

The concept of identity has been classified into three areas as described by Stuart Hall (1996).

- a) Enlightenment subject
- b) Sociological subject
- c) Post-modern subject

Hall (1996) also elaborates that the enlightenment subject is more of a conception of the human being as a fully matured human being which first emerged after the person was born. This essential centre formed the core of a person's identity. Secondly, the sociological subject was much more culture and society oriented. It echoed the complexities of the modern world and the change in behavioral patterns of the individual with respect to the societal changes. The identity formation in this sociological concept, bridges the gap between the inside and the outside. The post-modern subject, in fact conceptualizes as having no fixed or affirmed identity. In this phase, identity becomes a changeable pattern in respect of the ways we are culturally and socially.

What we eat or do not eat always forms a part of the continuous process of identity formation and carving out cultural boundaries. Food also forms a significant part of one's daily conversation, may it be in the marketplace or the dinner tables. Certain foods came to be associated with certain places. While fish and chip is quintessentially British, Bulgogi is definitely Korean⁶. These stereotypes seem to blur away as "cultures borrow, re-create and re-consume". Identity is quite a complicated concept; it is not an unproblematic one. The concept of identity is never to be thought as accomplished; rather this concept should always be considered as a 'production' which is always evolving.

⁶ <https://qz.com/india/639435/the-indian-curry-is-merely-a-figment-of-the-british-colonial-imagination/>

The way any human group eats helps it to articulate its diversity, oneness and assert the differences of the others who eat differently. The relationship of human identity formation to food is quite a complex one, bearing two dimensions. Firstly, it stretches from the “biological to the cultural side, i.e; from the nutritional to the symbolic function, whereas the second dimension stretches from the psychological to social”. While reading the earlier versions of studying the dietary habits of a particular group of individuals, the social scientists and anthropologists always affirmed the culinary habits in terms of nutritional requirements. While the social scientist begged to differ with the natural sciences regarding the same. The biologists and the natural scientists did not believe that human food acted as a source of symbolism. They only believed that food was barely a source of nourishment.

To clearly understand, how food forms an integral part of identity formation, one needs to assert the multidimensional facets of human relationship to food as analyzed by Fischler (1988)

- The omnivorous nature of human beings.
- The nature of the processes of incorporation of dietary habits among humans and its associated representations.

The above two were identified as the main reasons behind the entwining of dietary habits and its associated features as to why food forms an elementary role in identity formation, and because, identity and identification are both symbolic and vital, man is known to invent cuisine.

Fischler (1988) also notes, one of the important factor is human beings are categorized as omnivores. Omnivores, according to natural sciences, has been characterized as living beings whose diverse dietary habits ranges from that of the Inuits (Eskimos), consisting only of meats and fats, to that of the peasant farmers of South-East Asia, which contains no animal protein

(Stini, 1980). This is only to assert that the omnivore being, the human beings can survive on a diverse range of foods and, thereby change his food system, accordingly and is also subjected to innovation and exploration.

Secondly, we come to the process of incorporation of food. This incorporation of dietary habits forms an identity for the humans. To be more real and imaginative, a human being becomes what he/she eats. Food is also perceived as medicine. It becomes equally true in our beliefs and representations. The food that one consumes is, “universally it seems, supposed to act either on the state of organism or on its very nature (essence or identity), by analogical contamination, integration or impregnation” (Fischler, 1988). This incorporation attempts to take control over body, mind and therefore on the identity. Therefore, cuisine forms a central component in collective belonging and, thereby the identity.

Therefore, this forms an elementary feature in characterizing the Diaspora or the minority cultures. As known, the Diaspora tries to retain their culinary culture even when the original language of the culture has been forgotten. Human beings mark their culture and identity by what they eat, or more precisely, differentiates themselves from the others. For example, “Indians are identified by their curry, the Italians by macaronis, the English by Roast beefs and so on”. It can also be suggested that the “consumption of the food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and, therefore, a certain group which practices it”. Therefore, it becomes evidently clear, that food gives “a meaning to man and the universe, by situating them in relation to each other in an overall continuity and contiguity”. (Fischler 1988, 281)

While asserting the cuisine and the identity formation incorporated by the dietary habits among humans, the Diaspora surely comes into light. Ethnographically, it has been found out that

identities are expressed through dietary habits. The culinary practice in the Diaspora binds them together to recreate an identity in the Diaspora. As has been mentioned earlier, nostalgia is a very important emotion for the Diaspora, probably for an idealized identity that may have never existed. Nostalgia is also fabricated within a need for a sense of place and wish for authenticity that are often evoked by culinary practices. It is very often noticed, that women in the Diaspora, come together to prepare the authentic cuisine, “they may disagree occasionally on how best to crush chilies or soften chick peas, or in what sequence the ingredients should be added”. (Parveen 2016, 50). These dishes produce a nostalgic value connecting them to a shared cultural memory. It is the nostalgia that sense of loss, which makes the Diaspora want to recreate a part of their home through culinary recreations.

It has been generally observed that migrants often take care in serving their dishes and maintaining their authenticity to feel their experiences at home. The conversations at the dining table also revolve around food and this is how the Diaspora reframes and redefines their identity through the discourse of food. This talking about the discourse of food helps the migrants to construct a new identity; and eventually transports them back to home. These situations centered on food create an environment which seems similar to their homes, and “the migrants succumb to create their own identities, creating a community that stretches across borders”.

I would also like to draw attention to Arjun Appadurai’s work on imagination (1996). Imagination is a tool to reinvent and revisit their good old days in the long lost homeland. Appadurai (1996) has stated that there are three perceptions on the conception of imagination:

- The image
- The imagined community
- The social imaginary.

He further, explains imagination with reference to the mass migration as “an important means by which individuals exercise agency.” Therefore, imagination becomes a social practice for the communities in the Diaspora. Hence, it makes it easier to redefine their lives in the exile, i.e., the Diasporic lives.

Performance in eating helps the Diaspora to frame their identities. The Diaspora stresses to preserve their authenticity in food and its other related activities (preparation, serving and consuming). For instance, Indians, follow the custom of eating with their hands and this, in turn, marks their ethnicity and frames their identity. Therefore, the acts of eating and feeding reveal the characters of the performers in this process of consumption; thereby shaping their ethics.

Food and cooking are intertwined together to create a Diasporic identity and evoke memories of the homeland. There are recipes that have been passed on to generations within the family; thereby migrating overseas to form a strong cultural agenda for the Diaspora. The Diaspora is always addressed as the ‘other’ in the adopted country; with many associative factors affecting them. The concept of being dislocated and never fully belonging to the adopted country; leaves them to “romanticize the past”. The feeling of looking back to their country often creates an obstacle to coping up with the everyday world. Therefore, food here forms an important element in the cultural identity formation in the Diaspora. Immigrants have been continuously “racialized by the food that they tend to consume, both publicly and secretly”. This also forms a strong factor for “racialized immigrants to explore that classed and gendered dimensions of their personal and collective identities”.

Stuart Hall (1990) has vividly articulated the relation of the past with the Diasporic imaginary. This relation asserts that the experience of displacement “gives rise to a certain imaginary

plentitude, recreating the endless desire to return to their 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning" (Hall 1990, 245). We can, thereby state that Diaspora studies has evolved gradually and ultimately and has been used as the term to the reference of what Hall calls a "conception of identity". The diaspora is merely seen as a recreation of the original culture in the home.

As has already been stated and justified, that Diasporic subjects are "carriers of a consciousness" which distinguishes them from the others in the host country. As stated by Sunil Bhatia (2007), the identities of the diaspora are fragmented in the American society and how they are "inserted in the racial kinetics of the host society". Bhatia (2007) has stated three ways in which the otherness has been constructed in the Indian Diaspora: "generic otherness, marked otherness, disruptive otherness".

Generic otherness refers to the "voices appropriated by the participants and points to an undifferentiated and general notion of cultural difference." (Bhatia 2007, 113) This is more of a general mark of identity about their own cultural difference. The second type of marked otherness refers to the specific markers of identity which differentiates them with the host society. These, generally include language, accent and mannerisms that mark the individual as different. The third type, the disruptive otherness is more of a feeling of alienation in the diaspora. These form the direct feelings of race and gender discrimination (Bhatia, 2007). With the notion of being the 'other' in mind for the diaspora, I would like to quote Anita Mannur (2007) from one of her articles, where she penned down her own experience of being the 'other'.

"In April, 1982, my family moved away from Penang, Malaysia, and for the first time, I found myself having to eat lunch at school. When I first started carrying lunch to school, my mother would pack a lunch consisting of rice and dahl and rice and yoghurt into a *tiffin-dubba*, a

split level metal lunch container. My white Australian classmates would look on in curiosity at my weird box in a 'strange' container. I was that much closer to losing my status as 'Other' and becoming like my white classmates, or so I believed. My mother had 'Indianized' my lunch and created a bright yellow tuna fish sandwich filling spiced with green chillies, cilantro, chopped onion and turmeric". (Mannur 2007, 210)

According to the quote, Mannur faced a strong racialized society only on the basis of the type of cuisine that she consumed and the various culinary practices that were observed at her home. Among the many cultural marks that distinguish the Diaspora from the others, food forms a strong determining factor. While I am discussing about food and its various dimensions of study, I would like to bring to notice the observation made by Sunil Bhatia. While he was conducting a research on identity and belonging, one of his correspondent's Rekha's comments would be of much importance.

"No, I have more Indian friends, because... it boils down to food... It's very easy to cook Indian food and get together... But other than that, on a regular basis, I don't hang out with American people." (Bhatia 2007, 123)

With reference to identity formation, I would also like to state that theories of Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) on identity politics which have also been theorized to justify the identity of the migrant women and their association with food.

The difference may also arise out of gender issues, but the first and foremost difference that subjects them to being the 'other' is the cultural or racial difference which challenges the Diasporic identity. Crenshaw (1991) also suggests that the migrants are always considered as the 'other' due to their race, gender and the like. A common cultural trait tends to bind the Diaspora.

A strong sense of belonging is avidly observed in the Diaspora, when they unite in class and look out for belonging to the same country or community. At this juncture, I would like to introduce Paul Gilroy's (1987, 44) analysis of "new realism", where he argues on the fact that "the nation is represented in both biological and cultural terms".

The Diaspora, after migration, emerges with "hyphenated identities- Indian Americans, British-Cypriots, Greek-Australians, Italian-Americans" and the like. This, in turn, results in the creation of new identities which claim affiliation to both the nations. This hyphenated identity opens space for identities for "further changes and evolution and never remain static".

1.4 Women in the Diaspora

Women, in India (identified as a patriarchal country), are emblems of purity, chastity and bearers of the authentic culture from the homeland left behind. At this juncture, the diaspora even considers the second-generation daughters not only as emblems of ethnic identity but also acts against the "promiscuity of American influences." (Maira 2012, 49) The women in the Diaspora also bear the mark of embodying the ethnic identity and the past of the homeland that is left behind. This is again complicated with the narrower gender roles taking place in the society- the role of women as "carriers of culture" and men as "vehicles of labour". Again, to be more specific, our concern of study would be centered only on the role of women which is restricted to the household arena.

Prior to the formation of nuclear families, the roles of the male members in the families were restricted only to the thresholds of the kitchens. The men were deployed to go to the market and acquire the commodities required for cooking. The kitchen was a female dominated arena. In recent times, though men have proclaimed themselves as 'masterchefs' and have "adopted the

culinary enigma”, the household kitchens are still duly and efficiently managed by the women. Indian women have dutifully managed to perform their roles in the kitchens for years. Innumerable female writers like Avakian (1997), Elizabeth David (1950), M.F.K. Fisher (1943), Laura Shapiro (1986), Carole M. Counihan (1999) and the like have also done extensive research work on “food experimentation, wartime food and studies on women and food”. Therefore, with the role of women in the Diaspora and the culinary habits of the diaspora, I have chosen to frame my research questions, which are enumerated below.

1.5 Research questions and objectives:

- To examine into the cultural dimensions of cuisine.
- To examine the process of how food forms a strong entity in marking the cultural identity of the Diaspora.
- To understand the historical background of women’s migration from India to USA.
- It also aims to study the subjugated position of women in the Diaspora and their response to immigration and memories of homeland through cooking and food consumption.
- This thesis would also study the literary representations of food in the Diaspora, wherein, the multidimensional facets of the Diaspora- identity, belonging, consumption and cultural symbolism of food would be emphasized.
- It will examine the Indian Diaspora culinary writers, especially food bloggers.

1.6 Methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), research methodology is often determined by the research questions asked. As I have already enlisted some of the research questions for my study, I would like to elaborate on how I have tried to answer the research questions and investigate some way of looking at and concluding on the phenomenon studied. A qualitative research methodology has been adopted while conducting this study as this study reinforces on the understanding of human migration and its impact on dietary habits. The qualitative research methodology such as individual interviews, case studies and the like was employed because it provides a “holistic approach providing a larger picture to understand the setting and relationships within the system of study”. As my thesis is structured as an inter-disciplinary one, qualitative research methodology allowed me to provide a detailed description of the thoughts and beliefs professed by the bloggers, women respondents, the historical background of migration as well as the literary representations. The fieldwork in this study initiates research to be done on the Indian women residing in the USA. Field work was conducted from January to September 2018 separately for two chapters which are based on the analysis of the responses gathered from the respondents. The first set of respondents were Indian women food bloggers residing in the USA, while the other set of respondents were primarily women who enlightened me to perceive the changed food habits after migration. I have interviewed a total number of 105 respondents residing in the USA as the Diaspora, out of which 64 were respondents (men and women) who were not food bloggers, whom I had interviewed to understand the culinary culture in the USA and the other 41 were the women food bloggers.

At the beginning of the analysis, I read through the collected data to get an overall picture of the respondents’ overview and thoughts. During the analysis of the data, I also noted certain

similarities and dissimilarities in terms of their behavioral pattern in terms of their eating habits. This analysis helped me to articulate the findings in my study by quoting the respondents appropriately. I had referred and interviewed Indians residing in the USA and tried to understand and reflect on what their viewpoints were in terms of the questions that were asked. I had a few acquaintances in the USA who helped me to acquire the data and some food groups based in the USA also aided me in this venture. The analysis was not solely done on the data gathered by me, but also depends on secondary sources which concern the same topic or themes.

The online research method was used to collect data of the Indian women Diaspora who reside in the USA, from January to September 2018, and June to July 2020. I employed “in-depth individual interviews, case studies and purposive sampling technique through Internet by using the structured and un-structured questionnaires”. This methodology analyzes the discourses of being a part of the Diaspora, having a “variety of relationships with its frame, or bed”. (Leonardi 1989, 340). I also analyze the content of the food blogs by Indian Diaspora women in the USA. My research does not focus on the food blogs which offer reviews on food offered in restaurants or street food or some local food. Rather, it throws light on the food blogs written by the women in the Diaspora who write down their blogs to record their recipes; connecting themselves to their homeland and sharing it with the whole world.

I contacted the bloggers settled in the USA through Facebook, Instagram and emails. After joining the Facebook group called ‘Crave, Cook, Click’ which is based in Sunnyvale, California, USA, I could reach out to a number of bloggers who are active members in the group. With the social media acting as a catalyst in the process of online research, I have adopted the social media platforms to contact the bloggers. Online research methods are considered more impactful, considering the time and cost saving packages they come with. A questionnaire was sent to the

interested respondents. I could procure responses from 41 (forty one) food bloggers. Some famous bloggers did not bother to reply to any of the chats or emails which were sent to them. After repeated posts in the group and a number of messages sent to them, five respondents from the Facebook group filled up the questionnaire. Some of them are authors of cookbooks that have been published recently. One of the respondents, Sumana Doss Barman, being my acquaintance, could connect me to three other bloggers, who were happy to fill the questionnaire.

In the other section of the thesis, where I tried to analyze the situation in the Diasporic kitchens and if there are any changes in the gender roles that are played in the kitchens, I had employed in-depth interviews. The aim of this study was to observe the changes in dietary habits, if there are any, after migration. The time spent with some of my acquaintances, friends and family (through virtual media) residing in the USA, enabled me to have some insight on their food habits and foodways which identified them as Indian nationals residing in the USA. These observations and experiences have made a cumulative finding in the transnational identity of the migrants in the Diaspora and Indian women in the Diaspora. The women whom I have interviewed are not dependants, with a few exceptions. To attain an in-depth study of the position of the women in the Diaspora and the gender roles played in the kitchens, the narratives of the women have been presented as case studies of around 5 women. Later, I have analysed the situation in the Diaspora by analysing their thoughts on the changes in their dietary habits in the Diaspora by quoting them wherever it was necessary. The respondents in my thesis are within the age limit of 31-40 years. (Most of the respondents had ticked the age group within 31-40 years). The majority of the respondents are Hindu from diverse regions of India (Maharashtra, West Bengal, Chennai, Bihar, Assam). The women who are the respondents in my thesis are married and have migrated to the USA either for work purposes, higher studies or they have

migrated along with their husbands, as dependants. The study explores the ideas and thoughts that are relevant to their dietary habits observed in the Diaspora and if there are changes observed in the kitchens and diets after migration. Most of the women are ‘dependants’ on their husband’s work permit, unable to seek any employment after migration. It were these circumstances that have prompted the study of women whose lives revolve around the household and kitchens. There are a few exceptions to the majority of dependant women, who have expressed different points of view on the discussed theme.

According to the research principles or research questions that have been outlined in the previous paragraphs, this research aimed at understanding the themes associated with food in the Diaspora. Sufficient time was spent to analyze the data to ensure that the findings reflected well to construct the meanings that the respondents wanted to express. I have analyzed the literary representations of the culinary images in the Diaspora and also studied the historical background of the migration. In a qualitative research methodology, it is difficult to pre determine the number of respondents as I had sent out questionnaires to a large number of people who had expressed their interest in sharing their ideas and thoughts. Permission was obtained from the participants before conducting the interviews. There were also some respondents who had agreed to talk on video calls such as Facebook and Skype, though the number was less. It was further explained to them that the information gathered from them was solely for academic reasons and it would not be used for any other unethical purposes.

1.7 Chapterisation

Chapter Two aims to discuss the migration procedure from India to the U.S.A. It traces the genealogy of migration from the inception to the current pattern of migration and how it has marked a change in the identity in the Diaspora. It underlines the migration pattern and causes of Indians from the different provinces of India to the new-world. Women have been migrating from India from the pre-Independence era. Their migration pattern has undergone a formative change over the years and this chapter would also look into this area. The migration from the Indian sub-continent has been a very integral part in the history of Indian culture and society. To speak of culture, Indians who are very particular about their food habits have also tried to recreate the magic of their homelands in the Diaspora and this is how food studies have formed a very important sector in the Diasporic studies. It also aims at reviewing the literature available on how women formed the cultural carriers of the Diaspora. In this context, food, the central theme of the thesis would not be left unnoticed. The role of food, culture and women plays a fascinating role in the lives of the Diaspora. This chapter also enrolls the role of women and their gendered spaces through food.

Chapter Three aims at glorifying the literary representations of the culinary culture of the Diaspora. Food is an endlessly important lens for social and cultural analysis. This sphere of study is not only for anthropologists, but also for scholars of history, sociology, literature, economics and cultural studies. The fictions of the diaspora mainly concentrate on the elements of migrant identities, belonging, home, memory and marginalization. I would like to take up and discuss a few novels written by women writers. The sub-topic of consumption and food as elaborated by Anita Desai in her novel *Feasting, Fasting* (1999), food as a cultural marker in Shobha Narayan's novel *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes* (2003), the concept of identity

and belonging in Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997). Lastly, I would like to take up the novel *Pastries: A novel of Desserts and Discoveries* (2003) by Bharti Kirchner. It explores the terrains of food writing in order to produce encounters with food, race and gender. Memory is yet another important factor in the realm of food studies in the Diaspora. The novels examine how food traces the memory and identity formation through the culinary practices. This chapter also suggests the fondly re-created memories of the past by culinary practices, thereby evoking a complex set of emotions about home, identity and belonging.

Chapter Four endeavors to look into the forum of blogging and transnationalism online. The immense use of internet makes us connected to the whole world. In the male-dominated arena of internet, women of this age have carved out a space for themselves. Women have been found to be more enthusiastic while communicating online; than men- in interacting with others, writing about their own lives, and the like. Blog writing is an ongoing trend, where women seem to be more participative than men. They try to develop an identity or group identity through blogging. In this chapter, I would like to look into the different blogs, especially the food blogs which have been popularly written by women. I would also try to examine some food bloggers and try to frame out how they construct an identity through blogging in the Diaspora.

Chapter Five aims to investigate the effect of rituals in shaping the dietary habits of the Diaspora. This chapter also centralizes on the gendered aspect of women as the carriers of culture across the borders. Food is always held central to their relation with women's traditional domain, i.e; the kitchen. Most of the Diasporic women tend to be housewives in their host country. They maintain the authenticity of the food making rituals in the diaspora. Rituals in homeland determine the dietary habits in the Diaspora. This, in turn, enlivens the culinary nostalgia associated with home, as well as asserting the authenticity in the preparation of food in

the Diaspora. Here, I would like to look into the theories and the literature available on the same theme. Gender is a very important theme that is dealt with in this chapter. I have tried to incorporate theories of intersectionalities where scholars like Bandana Purkayastha (2012), Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) and the like have spoken about the issues of race, identity and gender and how it has been reflected in terms of the roles of women in the kitchens of the migrant families and in the transnational spaces.

The thesis comes to an end with the last chapter which is the conclusion. In this chapter I have tried to evaluate the findings of my research where I have also mentioned the limitations of my research. This chapter is more of a wrap up of the thesis, wherein the chapters and their findings are briefly summarized and the process of conducting the research was also done. The thesis and its findings are primarily conducted on an interdisciplinary level, where I have also mentioned the future scopes of the study.

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the literature review, thereby illustrating the concepts and methods familiar in this field of study. It was followed by some of the research questions and objectives that are attempted to be answered in the thesis.

Historical Background of Indian Diaspora in the USA

Humans have been migrating since ages and this process of migration has been considered a social phenomenon. It brings about socio-cultural, political as well as economical changes in the society, particularly in the lives of the migrants. Innumerable reasons have been pointed out as the reasons responsible for the migration of people. These particular sets of people who have been migrating across the borders of the countries have been termed as the 'Diaspora'. Over the years, social scientists have been conducting researches on the Diaspora and in contemporary times, this has been considered a prominent area of study for the sociologists. These studies have amplified the process of migration in terms of causes, patterns, social and cultural implications. These studies have also concluded that the migration has played an important role in accelerating the economic conditions in developing countries like India and also altering the socio-cultural background of the Diaspora. In this context, I would like to quote Upreti, who suggests that migration to him is, "a shifting of individual or group of individuals from one cultural system to another...." (Upreti 1981,2)

As stated by Theodore Caplow (1954), "migration is a change of residence and need not necessarily involve any change of occupation but it is closely associated with occupational shifts of one kind or another". There are different kinds of migration across borders and this is either external migrations or internal migrations, voluntary or forced migration also. The various

factors that are responsible for migration are classified as “economic, demographic, social, physiological and certain other related factors”. The major factors responsible for migration are defined as the ‘push and pull factors’. These factors with reference to the migration from India to the USA has been illustrated later in this study.

2.1. Genesis of migration from India

The largest group of people who had left India after the invasion of the British in India were the ones who served the Empire by working as unskilled labourers under a contract of the indenture and helping to provide raw materials to fuel the industrialisation. Many of these people worked in Natal, Trinidad, Mauritius and the Caribbean mainly on sugar plantations. There were many Indians who travelled overseas to join the Indian army of which the majority were Sikhs. They were rampantly found employed in countries such as Hong Kong, Malaya and in British colonies in East Africa. This experience in the army drew mainly the Sikhs to the northern parts of America, mainly Vancouver and California. Since then, the Sikhs are found widespread all over the northern parts of America and Canada. (LaBrack, 1982)

The common people also moved abroad to England as they worked as servants, mainly as *ayahs*, female servants who worked as nannies. Of these, there were about “4,000 Indians in England and 177 of them were women who worked as *ayahs*⁷. There was a considerable portion of people who travelled overseas for commercial opportunities and they travelled to as far as East and South Africa.” (Collingham, 2006)

An expanding group of Indian travellers would also take into account the migrants who would travel for higher education, professional training or what might be called for missionary or

⁷ Female nurse employed by the British

religious purposes to other countries. Among these the ones who travelled overseas to England to study belonged to the wealthy and the elite families who could, of course, incur the travel and living expenses. Most of them found their sojourn quite lonely and bewildering. There were innumerable instances of women travelling to England to study. The list included Cornelia Sorabji, who was to become India's first female lawyer, Indira Gandhi, India's first woman prime minister and of course Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, a young Hindu Brahmin widow, who converted into Christianity during her stay in England and established the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission in Pune after she returned to India. We would also look into the life of Pandita Ramabai as one of the pioneers among Indian women, as she went to England and subsequently to America for further studies. Therefore, it might be concluded that during the period "from the mid-nineteenth century to the first world war, many Indians had travelled overseas to other countries in search of a better life and prosperous opportunities". However, the outward flow of Indians from India had witnessed a reduction for some other reasons as well. "The indenture system was gradually abolished after the First World War and there were certain countries which had structured out different rules and policies for migrating to a particular country. The general mass needed passports to migrate to other countries compared to an earlier followed relaxed nature of migration when people did not need any kind of documentation to cross borders".

"After India gained its independence in 1947, which was followed by the partition of the country, humans witnessed a mass migration of people from both the sides of the border. This migration was based only on religious motifs accompanied by communal violence. This was marked by people who fled off to avoid this violence and destruction to other developed countries". Britain had already granted access for the South Asians to come and settle in their

own country only “on the virtue of their status as citizens of countries within the Commonwealth which emerged out of the old empire” (Brown 2006,25). The other countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia still did not follow relaxed rules of migration for South Asians. Gradually, since the 1960’s after the implementation of many immigration rules, the USA, Canada and Australia loosened their controls on immigration policies and allowed immigrants to come and settle in their country on the basis of work, which was primarily skilled work. The recent trends in migration have changed and western countries have drawn South Asians, specifically, Indians to Canada, Australia, the USA and New Zealand for highly-skilled work. (Brown, 2006)

Of the much larger population among South Asians, who had migrated to other countries; the maximum population was from India; a small number of people from Pakistan and the remaining population from Bangladesh. This South Asian diaspora have made remarkable changes in the cultural, political, social scenario of the host countries, “whether as semi-free labourers on contracts of indenture on plantations in Natal, the Carribean and Malaya; as traders and entrepreneurs in East Africa; as semi-skilled industrial labour in Europe; or as high-flying professionals in electronics and computing in the USA” (Brown 2006,3). In this research endeavour, I would narrow down and focus on the migration pattern of Indians to the USA and the reasons behind it.

The Indian Diaspora traces its origin in the USA since the 1700s, but the most remarkable presence started in the late 1800s. A remarkable number of migrants have arrived in the country in the post-1960s. With the evidence from the 2010 census of the USA more than 3.4 million

people trace their origin to South Asia⁸. The Indian Diaspora in the USA is a result of Indians migrating to the USA in different phases including the twice migrants.

According to Williams (2019), most of the immigrants were farmers from Punjab and Bengal. From 1900 to 1930 quite a number of Bengali Muslim street vendors had arrived in New Orleans, later migrating to cities such as Detroit, New York, and Baltimore. Though the preliminary arrival of the Indians can be traced back to the farmers from Punjab and Bengal, the present-day population in the USA can be listed as follows- the descendants of the migrants in the post-1960's era, the descendants of the migrants who had arrived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the twice-migrants and the Persons of Indian Origin residing in the USA . The later nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed a large mass of population migrating to the USA for technological and computing jobs and for higher studies. USA is now the country which has overtaken the UK and Canada in imbibing the largest number of highly educated and professionally highly skilled emigration from India. India is the country from where about five percent of all the migrants enter the USA with a maximum proportion of professionally qualified and skilled personnel. (Daniels, [chapter 4] , 2013).

With the commencement of the Indians in the USA, the research questions would obviously come into prominence about the reasons for migration from India. The Indian migration to the USA and the subsequent formation of the Diaspora can be analyzed into two different phases. As Kammer (2015) affirmed that the line of division can be drawn on the year of Indian independence or 1965, the year when the historical *Hart-Cellar Act* was passed which changed the migration pattern to the USA. There were other laws which were passed to make immigration rules stricter but the Hart-Cellar Act changed the migration pattern of the Asian Indians to the

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf>

USA. However, with the Indian independence in 1947, there has not been noticed a mass migration of Indians to the USA. The percentage of the immigrants were distinctly less compared to the noticeable proportion of migration after the 1965 Act. The following sub heads would try to illustrate the appropriate reasons that pushed the Indian immigrants out of the country:

- “Emigration from India occurred mainly as a result of the British conquest and the revolutions that took place in transportation and communication”.
- There were many elite families who wanted to send their off springs abroad for further studies in law, literature and the like. According to Verma (1995,15), “The number of students in the United States never exceeded 400- the peak reached in 1926 and 1927- except in 1947 when almost 1000 came”.
- As has been mentioned earlier about the Punjabi peasants who had left their own homeland to serve the British and had later settled in countries like Canada and the USA.
- “There were as many Bengalis from Calcutta, Bengal, carrying the legacies of Bengali renaissance and revival of Hindu religious norms and traditions, who were sent to America. One of the foremost arrivals in the USA was made by Swami Vivekananda, when he addressed at the World Congress of Religions held in 1893. The others who had travelled from India to the US on the basis of propagating spiritual messages and traditions from India were Swami Dayananda (1824- 1883), Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Paramanand and Swami Yogananda among many other preachers”.

I would like to analyze the two different phases of migration in threadbare. The primary phase would be categorized as the phase which occurred before 1965 and the other pattern was followed after 1965 onwards.

2.2. Migration before 1960's

The path of migration for the Indians to the USA has been quite a difficult one. In 1917, the US Congress party had passed an act which restricted the passage of the Asian immigrants from entering the *Asiatic Barred Zone*- a region that was entitled solely to the South Asians. The Indian Diaspora in the USA can be traced to as early as the mid-nineteenth century. “The first recorded migrant was from Madras in 1790, who arrived in Massachusetts. But as far as the documented migrants go, the migration had begun in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. With the ban of slavery system, emerged the concept of indenture labour system. The British had already established ‘mercantile capitalism’⁹ in India. The need for labour force in the United States and the availability of abundant labour force in India made the situation more feasible”. This situation paved a smooth path for the immigrants to go and settle in the USA in the late nineteenth century. (Williams, 2019).

As has been discussed earlier in brief, the arrival of the Sikhs to the USA in the 1880s and 90s was remarkably noticed and it marked its epoch in the exodus history of Indians to the USA. There were also migrants from the other parts of India- Gujarat, Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh. They travelled via Hong Kong and reached to the West Coast of North America. The Sikhs from Punjab who had migrated to the USA who had prior training in farming found it very easy to adapt to the conditions of the farming in the new adopted land. As I have mentioned earlier, men

⁹ Mercantile capitalism also refers to merchant capitalism. It refers to the movement of goods from the markets where they are cheap to markets where they are more expensive.

from Punjab started migrating from Punjab as farmers on the West coast of Canada. About 6,800 Indians had immigrated to the United States between 1899 and 1914. They were chiefly farmers from Punjab (mainly Sikhs), “men from martial castes and landowning families” (Leonard, 1992). The immigrants from Punjab hailed from the “Malwa and Doaba districts” as well as from “the districts of Jullunder, Hosiarpur, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ludhiana” in Punjab. The primary motives of migration to Canada and the USA were mainly “population pressure, rural debt and subdivision of labour”. They were subjected to a situation which posed a threat to the Sikh population where agriculture and money-lending were the most profitable sources of making a living. It has been estimated that “about 60 percent of the population did not own land for their own use”. This was the major factor which played its role in the emigration of Sikhs to Canada and the USA. There were hundreds of Sikhs who had emigrated to North America. After facing major hardships in new country, by 1920s they had established themselves as successful businessmen. According to Rajani Kant Das (1923, 93), they had “in the course of a few years, changed their status from that of common labourers to that of farm operators, farmers, independent businessmen and even employees”. Among the street vendors, “Dady Burjor was a notable trader who imported Manila cigars in San Francisco. Among the other notable personells were Dalip Singh Saund, who was a lettuce farmer-businessman, Ram Nath Puri who was the manager of India-America Trade Development Co. in Fair Oaks, California”. (Das, 1923)

These men were unable to bring their wives along with them, thereby decreasing the number of female immigrants in the USA. This, consequently led the Punjabi men to perform inter-racial marriages with white women which were against the law. This led to the Punjabi and Muslim men marrying Catholic Mexican immigrant women. These migrants were later joined by other Sikhs who were working on British cadres, as they travelled from the United Kingdom. This

specific group of immigrants who had travelled from the UK were termed as the East Indians and this differentiated them from the other Sikhs. (Leonard, 2010)

“Sikhs are only two per cent in the homeland but between 30 and 40 per cent of the East Indian population in California. Muslims make up 5 per cent of the population of India but are probably a smaller proportion in the U.S. The Jains from the areas of Gujarat and the Zoroastrians from Bombay are small groups in both countries”. (Jensen, 1988)

It is noted that according to the U.S Immigration Commission's Dictionary of Races or People, the term East Indians signified any native of the East Indies. This definition included a wide range of people from “the inhabitants of the Philippines to the Aryans of India, and the East Indian immigrant regardless of their home, culture or religion were called the *Hindus* or *Hindoos*”. (Melendy ibid: 186). As a result of adverse incidents of racial discrimination against the East Indians, they were barred from entering the USA on the pretext that the living conditions in the USA were not suitable for the East Indians. The East Indians had entered the country between the period of 1901 and 1920, with a gradual decline of their arrival around 1911 with the passing of the laws of Exclusion and Restriction, to stop the migrations from Asia. (U.S. Census, 1975¹⁰)

According to Lee (1999), the entry of the Asians was obstructed with the enactments of various laws.

- i. “The ‘*Barred Zone*’ *Immigration Act* of 1917 had stopped all Asian immigration, though the Filipinos and Mexicans still were allowed to come only to provide labour for agriculture.

¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs/data/1975.html>

- ii. “*The Naturalization Act* of 1923 which again made the East Indians ineligible for citizenship.
- iii. The *Asian Exclusion Act* of 1924 was a United States federal law that banned the immigration of other non-white immigrants.
- iv. Apart from the laws that restricted Indian Americans to enter the United States, there was the *Alien Registration Act* of June 28, 1940 which compelled every Indian who were considered ‘alien’ to apply for registration and to record their finger prints within 30 days. The students, merchants, settlers and visitors were classified under this act”.
- v. There were some other laws which allowed the admission of five other categories of Indians which were:
 - “Under Section 3 subdivision (1) of the *Immigration Act of 1924*: A government official, his family, attendants, servants and employees”.
 - Section 3 subdivision (2): An Indian “visiting the United States temporarily as a tourist or temporarily for business or pleasure”.
 - Under Section 4(b): “An Immigrant previously lawfully admitted to the United States who is returning from a temporary visit abroad”.
 - Section 4(d): “Religious preachers and university or college professors, their wives and unmarried children under the age of 18”.
 - Under Section 4(a): “Bonafied students”.

These acts restricted the immigration of the Indians from the British India, specifically. They were denied rights of land ownership as well as basic naturalization rights in the USA. The

proportion of emigration of “Indians to the USA was recorded to be comparatively higher during the period of 1890 to 1930”. This period also witnessed the in pouring of university students, of which many came under the prestigious scholarship schemes or from some elite Indian families. Another important act which made way for the international students was the *Full Bright-Hays Act* of 1946. “The period of 1950s observed a huge migration of students from India on scholarships and fellowships”.

Among all the Asian immigrants in North America, the “Indians were the weakest ethnic group”. The larger part of Indians who had poured into California whose constitution had clearly states discrimination against Indians. They were considered “aliens” and posed “dangerous to the well-being of the State”. The Exclusion League proposed in 1908 proposed the exclusion of all Asians exclusively from the USA. This league called immigration from India “an avalanche of death from the Himalayas”. Their agenda was to stop Indians from settling in America and developing their roots in the country.

“As days passed, Indians ceased emabarking on the shores of the USA for further development in careers. After the exclusion of the Chinese and Japanese, it was the turn of the Indians to be treated in the same way. They bore allegations of serving as a menace to American culture, bearing loathsome and contagious diseases and the like”. (Chandrasekhar, 1994)

2.3. Migration in the Post 1965 Phase

The pattern of migration after 1965 was different in many aspects. One of the influential factors for the changes in the “socio-political scenario of many nations was the Second World War II”. The Second World War had brought massive changes in independent India also, thereby

aggravating the migration procedure. “After the Second World War, the USA had emerged as one of the powerful nations in the world with expanding multinational corporations and printing media and communication revolution.” On the other hand, India was running short of job opportunities which accelerated the migration of the educated mass to the USA. This situation, in turn, paved the way for the second phase of migration in the 1960’s era. The migration after mid-1960 was a result of the law passed in the year 1965. This wave of migration started with the talented and educated class of people migrating from India and consisting of doctors and engineers. They could easily get jobs after formal training required to get corresponding jobs in the States. This group of people belonged to the urban middle class, the educated and the elite families who could afford their education in India and subsequently send them to the USA so that they could adjust themselves within the American social structure. As Li and Lo (2009) analyzed that, there was an outflow of migrants from India, thereby resulting in an outflow of talent from the country. “This phase also witnessed the migration of unmarried men and women only on the basis of the 1965 Act’s emphasis on the family reunion. There were many more Indians who had entered the USA on the basis of family relationships, i.e.; on the basis to join their families who had already obtained U.S citizenship with work permits. Some also migrated to the States on student visas, as potential investors or on basis of other categories like refugees or so. This marked a huge impact on the demographic composition of the Asian Indians in the States. With the arrival of thousands of students from India to the USA, by 1926, there were as many as seventy-eight percents of Indian students in America from India studying various subjects such as engineering, chemistry, and agriculture”.

Khadria (1999) also noticed and analyzed a new pattern in the migration pattern was noticed “in the late 1980s when there was a sudden growth in the software industry in India”. This process of

migration resulted in a large outflow of Indian residents from India to the USA which is generally termed as the 'brain drain'. "USA is now claimed as the country which has overtaken the UK and Canada in brain drain". It still imbibes the largest number of immigrants of highly educated and highly skilled professionals from India. India is the country from where "about five percent of all the immigrants enter the US with a maximum proportion of professionally qualified and skilled personnel". This concept has faced changes with the evolution of migration patterns and procedures. As has been observed by Glenn Garvin (1995), "Immigrants bring with them high-tech expertise and the knowledge of the way businesses organize and market themselves in other parts of the world."¹¹

Ajailiu Niumai (2011) in her article *Indian Diaspora Philanthropy: A Sociological Perspective* argued that the Indian immigrants in the USA were portrayed as "the model minority who were hardworking, successful and achievement-oriented". And, she asserts that the concept of model minority has been criticised as it did not represent the diversity of communities based on castes, religions, and the like. One of the dilemmas of the model minority stereotype is that it oversimplifies the lived experiences of Indians in the USA.

As Li and Lo (2009) elaborated on the Immigration Act passed in the year 1990 that took a toll in the placement of the international labor market approach. The quota for skilled professionals "increased from 54000 to 140000 for priority workers, specifically for those who had specialized in the fields of science, technology and medicine". This, again, saw the increase in the rate of migration day-by-day with the companies hiring professionals and immigrants coming in the country with H-1B visas. With the signing in of the 1999 Omnibus Appropriation bill into law, "which was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate by a majority of 333 to 95

¹¹ <http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/impact/w95/RN/mar24news/Merc-news-immigrant.html>

and 65 to 29 respectively on both sides”. According to the law, “the intake of the immigrants through the H-1B visa had been increased from 65000 to 115000 in the year 1999 and 2000, 107000 in the year 2001 and was back to 65000 in the year 2002”. This again implied the immigration from many other countries, including India to the USA.

There also existed a group of people who were termed as the ‘illegal immigrants’ in the USA. “In 1986, the U.S Congress made changes in the immigration laws by passing the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* (IRCA) that was signed by President Reagan. This law was passed to favour the illegal immigrants, mainly the people who hailed from the neighbouring country of Mexico”. This, in turn, favoured the Indians who had illegally entered the USA. (Bean and Khuu, 2020)

2.4. Immigration rules and policies

Immigration to the USA, which has involved a large mass of people across the borders; has helped to articulate the socio-economic scenario of the nation, and in the process also marked an impact on the immigrants. The immigration laws have been framed according to the various stages of the history of the immigrants to the nation. Therefore, to understand the history of immigration history to the USA, one must comprehend the ways in which the immigration and naturalization acts have been constructed, thereby aggravating the complex processes that took place thereafter. “The immigration policy encapsulates a broad disposition of not only the laws passed by the Congress of the USA but also the judicial cases that have been implemented to frame the immigration and naturalization laws”.

According to LeMay, Barkan and LeMay (1999, xxii), the naturalization and immigration rules that have been carved out involve a complex balancing of different intentions and objectives that have major roles in shaping the rules. “The different variables that had been taken into account in lieu of framing the laws are:-

- Religious, racial beliefs and concepts relating to gender.
- The economic needs of the nation.
- Societal and cultural factors on deciding who should be allowed entry to the nation, which also concerns the issue of identity.
- Foreign policy issues.”

The history of immigration laws and their restrictions since the late nineteenth century reflects the laws of immigration and the reasons for the denial of entry to the nation. The methods to control immigration policies included mostly the excluded categories- “groups deemed to have undesirable physical or mental characteristics- literacy tests, the imposition of a quota system, the development of an elaborate system of preferences, labour certification, refugee, asylum, and parol status, and employer sanctions”. (LeMay, Barkan and LeMay 1999, xxvii). These laws were implemented to control the immigration processes to the USA. The USA is a “nation of nations”, and the rules implemented also focuses on the culture and politics of the nation. These processes which were implemented by the USA government has highlighted how the nation evolved its immigration and naturalization policies in response to “the cultural, societal and political needs of the nation”.

“The history of the implementation of the rules and regulations can be divided into four spheres. The first part, i.e; the classic period of immigration was marked by few restrictions of the newcomers: the white persons were restricted entry to the nation in 1790”.

“The other nations such as Europe, China and Japan were undergoing immense societal and economic changes which required a reorganization of the society to solve the problems. Europe went through a transition in agriculture with the breakage in the old agricultural system to farmers owning individual land which supplied to the urban market economy. Along came the wafting of the Industrial Revolution which started in England, gradually spreading its roots all over Europe as employment orders disintegrated. Innumerable farmers, artisans moved from their own villages to an urban setup and finally moving to the USA. The migration pattern in China and Japan also followed similar traits. Many ‘push’ factors contributed to the migration of millions of people from Europe and Asia to the USA. There were many who came as “sojourners” who intended to stay for a while in the USA and return later. Before the implementation of the 1920s quota system, this pattern of migration was observed by the Greeks, Italians, Eastern Europeans, Chinese and Japanese migrants”. (LeMay, Barkan and LeMay1999, xxix)

The ‘pull’ factors which attracted innumerable immigrants from around the world were religious freedom, “politically open society”, and the need for unskilled labour to irrigate the abundant landscapes available for proper utilization for the growth of the economy. LeMay, Barkan and LeMay (1999) further elaborated on the different laws passed by the USA government for stricter imposition of immigration laws narrated below. The Congress passed the first naturalization act in 1790. The first phase of this law facilitated the citizenship of those people who had resided in the country for two years and had kept their current state of residence for a year to apply for citizenship. Further turmoil in Europe compelled Congress to be stricter with the rules of naturalization and immigration. The second act of the law required a minimum residence of five years and also came with an added requirement of three years notice of

intention to apply for citizenship. The naturalization act of 1798 further required a minimum of 14 years of residence and five years of notice to intend to apply for citizenship. This was known as the *Alien Act* which allowed the President to oust any such citizen who was considered a threat to the nation.

“In 1802, Congress restored the *Naturalization Act* of 1795. There was a huge up rise in the number of Catholic migrants during the 1830s and 1840s”. Furthermore, the “discovery of gold in California in 1848 drew a large number of unskilled migrants to the west coast of the nation. The transcontinental rail road construction also drew a massive number of immigrants to mine coals, to work in the mills and factories”. LeMay, Barkan and LeMay (1999,xxxi) also mentions that the “Gold rush, rail road construction and the labour to work in mills and factories drew thousands of Chinese to the West coast, which in turn, became popular as ‘The Yellow Peril’. The Congress passed the *Chinese Exclusion Act* in 1882 to limit the migration of Chinese individuals. This act restricted the Chinese from migrating to the USA for 10 consecutive years. Later there were amendments made in 1884 which restricted the previous migrants to leave and return, and also stated that the law specifically applied to the ethnic Chinese. It was abolished in 1943, although large scale Chinese immigration was not witnessed until 1965”.

LeMay, Barkan and LeMay (1999) states an astounding amount of “23.5 million immigrants flooded into the United States mainly from the Eastern, Central and South Europe and also from Asia. This large mass of migration resulted in the culmination of more restrictive laws aimed at the group of immigrants who were considered undesirable to the nation. They had ‘alien’ characteristics like their colour, customs, language and physique; which, somehow aroused fear among the residents of the nation, thereby making it difficult for them to assimilate with the common mass”.

Congress also banned the entry of immigrants who were of poor health and did not know the English language. The English language was considered a parameter to measure the likeliness to enter the USA. “A law was passed in 1882 which banned the entry of ‘lunatics’ and carriers of infectious diseases. In 1906, legislation was introduced which included a literary test for admission and English language test for naturalization. The literacy test was an addition to the Immigration Act of 1917”. (Cafferty, Chiswick and Greeley 1983)

The United States Congress passed the *Emergency Quota Act*, in 1921, which authorized national immigration quotas based on the immigrants’ country of origin. “These quota laws hugely decreased the immigration rates from 23.5 million to less than 6 million. This national origins quota system was implemented in 1929 and was in its place until 1965. In 1925, Congress also created a border patrol for controlling illegal migration through borders. With World War II coming to an end, there were a massive number of refugees, alien wives, children and the families entering the nation. The number of refugees came to around 40,000 and another 120,000 others from the armed forces to immigrate to the United States. With this condition, President Truman came up with initializing a law, the *Displaced Persons Act* of 1948. The momentous 1923 Supreme Court case of United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind created an upsurge which motivated to classify the South Asian Indians as non-white. Indians were allegedly stripped of their citizenship which was claimed by the prosecutors that they have acquired illegally. The Indians were also barred from acquiring land property in the USA with the implementation of *The California Alien Land Law* of 1913, thus stripping them of citizenship rights. *The Immigration Act of 1924* (Johnson-Reed Act) came up with a more complex plan, the National Origins Formula. This act set quotas for immigration from Asia, quotas for Eastern hemisphere. Quotas on specific countries were based only on 2% of the US population as

recorded in 1890. This resulted in effecting Italians, Jews, Greeks, Poles and Slavs. According to the U.S Department of the State Office of the Historian, this law was enacted to preserve the homogeneity of the nation”. (LeMay, Barkan and LeMay 1999)

With the emergence of the era of globalization, the immigration rules and policies shifted from the quota system to an elaborate preference system. With the coming in of the *Luce-Cellar Act of 1946*, ended the discrimination against the Indian Americans and Filipinos. “The Luce-Cellar Act was proposed by Republican Clare Booth Luce and Democrat Emanuel Celler and was signed by President Truman on 2nd July 1946. Indian Americans were not allowed to enter the nation after the United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind case in 1923, but this situation was reversed after the passing of the Luce-Cellar Act. Indian Americans could also acquire land and property as well as could also petition for the family from their land of birth. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (the *McCarran-Walter Act*) revived the quotas again. Against this Act, the maximum quota allocation went to countries like Ireland, the United Kingdom and Germany who had family residing in the USA. *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* (the Hart-Cellar Act) also changed the quota based migration. It changed the basis of quotas by ending the National Origins Formula that had been working in the USA since 1921. The 1965 Act made a change in the US policy which had discriminated against the non-northern Europeans. This new law created visa categories that highlighted on the skills of the immigrants and also kept in mind the familial relationships with citizens or USA residents. This law set a limit of 160,000, which included a maximum of 20,000 individuals per country for Western Hemisphere nations”. (LeMay, Barkan and LeMay,1999) Regarding this law, the then chairman of the Senate Immigration Sub Committee, Edward Kennedy said that “the bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society. It will not relax the

standards of admission. It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs”. (U.S Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Committee on the Judiciary, Washington, D.C., Feb. 10, 1965. Pp.1-3)

“There were mass refugee movements to handle the inflow of refugees from China, Cuba, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. The situation could not be handled by the existing authority and this inadequacy led the Government to launch the *Refugee Act of 1980*. This act allowed an estimate of 50,000 and the entry of worldwide immigrants was reduced to 270,000 annually. The Immigration Reform and Control Act were passed in 1986, creating penalties for employers who hired undocumented immigrants”.¹² The Immigration Act of 1990 was a modified and expanded version of the 1965 Act. “This Act increased the limit of migrants to 700,000 and visas by 40 per cent. The main criteria for this act were family reunification and migration related to employment. The other laws which were signed for stricter immigration passages included the *Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA)* and *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility of 1996 (IIRIRA)*. As a result of the enactment of these laws, about 2 million individuals were deported since 1996”. (LeMay, Barkan and LeMay, 1999)

Furthermore, as we proceed towards the 21st century, the world had witnessed the colossal terrorist attack that took place on September 11, 2001. This widely affected American perspectives on issues like migration. “The attacks killed about 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others. The terrorists who took part in this massive attack were a total of 20 foreign tourists, of which 19 took part. The terrorists utilized the loopholes prevalent in the USA immigration system, by entering on student or tourist visas. Four of them had denied the normal

¹² <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/refugee-act-1980/>

protocols of visa”¹³. *The Real ID Act of 2005* changed some limits of visas, tightened its restrictions and made it easier to exclude suspected terrorists. The House of Representatives and the Senate produced their own bills in 2006, which were conflicting within themselves. “The House passed the *Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act* of 2005. This law was implemented to focus on both the border and the interior. *The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act* was passed in May 2006 (CIRA). This allowed long term illegal immigrants to gain citizenship and also introduced the new ‘blue card’ visa program. This was reinforced along the southern USA border with Mexico.

The Senate discussed the *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act* of 2007 in 2007. “This provided legal citizenship to about 12 million undocumented immigrants residing in the USA. It included funding for 300 miles of vehicle barriers in the border, 20,000 border patrol agents and 105 camera and radar towers. Along with restricting the barriers at the border, the bill, simultaneously restricted visa criteria for highly skilled personnel. The bill was introduced in the Senate on May 9, 2007, but it was never voted on. The number of naturalized citizens increased from 500,000 to 1,000,000 per year since the 1990s with the years of 1996 and 2008 being the peak years of allowing a majority of 1,040,000”. These numbers were a separate list as the list for illegal immigrants was different. The laws of immigration changed, thereafter, more changes in the socio-political conditions of the State. The temporary work permits were different from the legal immigration visas. Permits to students vary with permits to tourists. Even those with the

¹³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks

H1-B visas, who are legally allowed to work on a temporary basis in the USA must apply for permanent residence separately¹⁴.

Lately, President Donald Trump seemed to oppose the H1-B visa and he has repeatedly emphasized on the fact that illegal immigrants are supposedly criminals, though studies have found out that they have lower crime rates than the native born Americans. The USA witnessed many changes in the implementation of the various rules for immigration and will continue to do so in the future¹⁵.

2.5. Geographical Distribution

It can be observed that there is a difference in the settlement patterns between the immigrants during the early phase of migration and the immigrants during the later part of migration, i.e; post 1960. The new immigrants were widely spread over the USA. “They never got segregated in one particular place like the Chinese in the Chinatowns”. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Indians settled around the western part of the USA, like California. According to Sheth (1995,175), “The New York Jersey metropolitan area, home to more than 200000 Indians, can be considered the capital of Asian Indians in the United States” and further adds that “the sub ethnic diversity characterizing Indian immigrants is a disadvantage for establishing a territorial community. Moreover, because Indian immigrants, like Filipinos, are generally fluent in English, they may not need a territorial community”.

¹⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_laws_concerning_immigration_and_naturalization_in_the_United_States

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_policy_of_Donald_Trump

It should also be noted that according to the 1990 census¹⁶, “there are about 815447 Indians in the United States, of which there is an increase of 33 percent annually. They are found abundantly in states of California (159,973), Texas (55,795), New Jersey (79,440) and Illinois (64,200)”. (Kanjilal 1996, 87). With the imposition of the 1965 immigration law, a surge in the arrival of highly educated and skilled professionals was noticed in various American cities which claimed as being the “land of opportunities” which “attracts the best, the cream of the society in India”. (Sami, 1990).

2.6. Migration pattern of women from India to USA

As has been observed in most of the studies, men have always formed a majority of the migrant population. The women population has been pointed out as marginal, but according to feminist studies on migration, women have also formed a considerable part of the migrant population and at times have also outnumbered men. The reasons for migration varied from culture to culture and from place to place. However, according to Gabaccia (2000, 27), women also faced stricter U.S immigration laws that “increasingly institutionalized American assumptions about gender relations”. According to a recent study conducted by American Immigration Council (2020), “there are more than 23 million immigrant women in the USA”. “Immigrant women come from every nook and corner of the world and now they have outnumbered the proportion of immigrant men. Nearly more than a quarter of immigrant women have a bachelor’s degree or more education, with the most highly educated mass coming from India, followed by immigrants from the Philippines and China”. During the early waves of migration in the late 19th and 20th centuries, South Asian women were specifically restricted to migrate to the USA. Immigration

¹⁶ *Statistical Record of Asian Americans*, 1993 (tables 801, p. 689)

policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and Asiatic Barred Zones had restricted migrants to travel to the USA to encourage the male migrants to return to their homelands. Despite these restrictions in migration rules, women still entered the USA as wives, students, workers (skilled or unskilled), mothers, and grandmothers and integrated into every part and parcel of life in the USA¹⁷.

As has been mentioned earlier, before the 1965 Immigration Act a large number of immigrants arrived from India which combined students, scientists, medical doctors and engineers and “a handful of Indian merchants”. They mainly came from urban middle-class families, having good education in English and a good training in the British education system. Within this community of immigrants from India were a number of Indians who had “western spouses”. “The South Asian population which entered the USA after 1970 were primarily highly educated. The women who migrated amounted to about 70 percent of the immigrant community. They belonged to the middle and upper classes. According to the 1990 US census, 55 percent of South Asian women at least have a bachelor’s degree and 59 percent of women belong to the working group. This group of relatively small Indian migrants was male with a few women as their counterparts or ‘unmarried foreign students’. The Indian community in the USA was more diversified due to differing cultural, religious and political arenas. By the mid-1970s, the Indian community had started to expand their community by bringing their relatives to the USA after the implementation of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. This, in turn, led to the development of small social communities “of multigenerational households and networks of relatives”.

¹⁷ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrant-women-and-girls-united-states?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=pmd_1a277233d068cc945c0060fb67e9ea5b9c78d5ca-1627383851-0-gqNtZGzNAk2jcnBszQgO

“In the late 1980s, a large cluster of Indian population appeared in the streets of America as street vendors, newspaper sellers, food cart business and private cabs drivers. The other group of immigrants such as the Russians, Carribeans or Latins have followed their own pattern of jobs, the Indians have been following the pattern of maintaining their own jobs in newspapers, stores, driving and also working in gas stations” (Lessinger,1996). The women have also formed a major part in the labour force of the Indian migrant population. “Many of them have been found to supply *samosas*¹⁸ to Indian stores. The women would be found engaged in jobs which would also include pick and drop services of readymade products. These women were very less paid, but they had the advantage of getting it in cash. Besides all these jobs, the women were also involved in jobs of baby-sitting, assembling machine tools and supplying food to Indian stores”. With these discussions around the corner, we get to observe how gender shapes the pattern of migration, specifically the women who have been migrating from India to the USA. Generally, women have been observed to be migrating as spouses or workers. Women migrants constitute about half of the migrant population, but there are noticeable changes in the motivations, reasons and limitations that characterise their movements. However, “the migration pattern of women has noticed obstruction due to family formation and familial duties. Indian women, have been moving across borders due to matrimonial alliances or family reunification policies and also work opportunities which also create pathways for women’s migration pattern”.

The first phase of migration would trace the migration pattern of women in the early period, whereas the later part would trace the migration of IT professionals, mainly women between India and the USA. Research reveals that a woman’s life in South Asia is majorly determined by some patriarchal system.

¹⁸ A popular Indian snack pattie

While there has been noticed extensive research on men migrating for job or educational opportunities across borders, women's stories have mostly been overshadowed. Here I would like to profile some noteworthy women who have been travelling overseas for educational opportunities such as Pandita Ramabai and Anandibai Joshee. They were considered the first well documented Indian women travelers to the USA in the 1880s. Anandibai Joshee's life has been very well documented. "She had set sail from Calcutta in 1883 to New York City, being one of the high caste women from India to travel abroad to study. She had arrived to the USA to study medicine and had enrolled herself at Women's Medical College of Philadelphia".

Eventually, we come to Pandita Ramabai who was also "sent overseas for medical training after working as a social reformer in India. After she had faced hardships of being a widow in India, she travelled to Britain with her young daughter, Manorama Bai, for her studies. After this, she joined Joshee in the USA. She had also translated textbooks and had given lectures around the USA on the condition of women in India. Ramabai was born to extremely liberal Brahmin parents on April 23, 1858. Her father wanted his daughter to be educated which would remain unhampered by Hindu customs and traditions. She had faced relentless hardships until she married a Bengali gentleman in Calcutta. After the death of her husband, Ramabai felt a strong urge of training herself, thereby deciding to go to England to study. In 1886, she travelled to America to witness the graduation of her cousin, Mrs. Joshee. After many efforts, she succeeded in forming the Ramabai Association on Dec 13, 1887, with the objective of giving education to high-caste child widows of India"¹⁹.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandita_Ramabai



Fig1. Source: Downloaded from Google

2.7. Women's migration as housewives

In recent studies, it has been observed that women migration has gained momentum and this has been analyzed through many disciplines notably anthropology, geography, history, law and society, psychology, sociology, political science and gender studies. “The study of gender formed a pivotal part in the field of social sciences by the mid-1970s. Social scientists used many such methodologies used in the discipline to conclude that the term ‘gender’ differed from the biological sex. Consequently, a considerable part of studies emerged which focused on gender roles. Part of the studies concluded that women were mostly assigned inferior status, socially as well as in the private domain. Women were always related to household oriented work which was considered menial, as it does not generate remuneration”.

“In the contemporary times, the term gender has taken on a massive role. It is not exclusively limited to families, households or female lives. The entire phenomenon of migration

is termed as gendered phenomenon” (Grasmuch and Pessan, 1991; Hondagneu- Sotelo, 1994; Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Scholars have started analyzing gender in all the spheres of life, be it, in the lives of the male and female migrants, in the Diasporas, in the workplaces of the migrants and even for the foreign-born population.

As has been recorded, women migrated only on the basis of family reunification. As has been suggested by Karen Leonard (2007), primarily the movement of men across borders was noticed in a huge scale, rather than the migration of women. Subsequently, the men who had migrated to the United States got married to Mexican women and settled there. Later, with the arrival of more men across the borders, the demand for brides increased as NRIs were in more demand of Indian wives rather than marrying Americans or women of foreign descent. The H-1B visa program is highly used by young men working abroad, whereas studies show that there have been a very less number of women who have been availing this visa. However, women nearly make about half of the population of H-1B visa holders as dependents. The H-1B visa holders, who are mostly men, have many changed criteria while choosing their wives. They often prefer women who are well educated and who would come and work after marriage. Despite their open-mindedness, there are people who have the notion also set in their minds that men are natural bread earners of the family and if for any reason, the wife needs to leave her job, it is considered to be very normal. This has been observed in studies by Carol Updahyay and A.R Vasavi (2006), where they have reported that the new generation IT workers prefer wives who would leave their formal employment and sit back at their homes to look after their families. A recent study (CSDS-KAS)²⁰ 2016 reveals that young generation Indian men often bear a patriarchal attitude towards marriage and family life. “The survey shows that 51 per cent of the

²⁰ Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Konrad Adenauer Societies

participants believed that women should be obedient to their husbands, whereas 41 per cent of the participants believed that women should leave their jobs after marriage”.

Therefore, in the case of H-1B/ H-4 visa holders, women’s role becomes much more constricted and they eventually turn out to be housewives. The term ‘housewife’ often implies “the role of the caring and social entity that the woman plays in the household, thereby, allowing men to be ideal, global employees”. This task of managing the household is often de-valued and termed as women’s natural roles as caretakers of the family. There are many a time when this work of being a housewife is degraded as non-productive, since this work does not derive wages or any kind of financial profit. The Indian male population is able to accumulate capital in their role as “breadwinners” who are free to sell their own labour capital, because women, who more precisely act as housewives, are not allowed to do the same. The male population which comprises mostly of H-1B visa workers tend to live with their roommates, thereby managing their expenses by cooking and cleaning on their own. Consequently, after marriage, after the arrival of women in their lives, the workforce tends to get divided and this, in turn, amplifies the caring and reproductive roles that women play in the families. Even when a woman skips out of the household domain, they have to manage the household as well as the labour workforce outside the household. Women’s workload often tends to multiply when they start working outside their homes.

Women in India are deeply involved in socio-cultural surroundings and belief systems that are entwined in mythical narratives. These narratives are based on patriarchal hierarchies and gendered perceptions. Therefore, Indian women are characterized as docile, obedient and submissive to the stereotypical patriarchal norms dominant in Indian society.

My name is Sarmistha Bhattacharjya.

INTERVIEWED BY Nilanjana Bhattacharjya

"My first impression was that it looked like a fairy tale... I felt a sense of freedom, though there was both fear and joy in the back of my mind."





DEPARTED FROM
Kolkata, India

ARRIVED IN
Boston, Massachusetts

YEAR
1970

AGE
22

Fig. 2. Source: SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive).

The above picture portrays the first picture of an Indian woman who departed from Kolkata, India in the year 1970 to accompany her husband in Boston, Massachusetts. Her personal memories declare that she had arrived at Logan airport, Boston at the age of 22 with the wife of another relative. Her experiences that she had narrated to SAADA²¹ were more of mixed experience and she bore a mixed identity in the new country. Among the many stories collected by SAADA, I chose this story to exemplify the situation of the women who would migrate along with their husbands to a new country, where she didn't know she would "need a coat, boots, hat, and gloves"²². Though her identity as an Indian which was signified by her "saris, bindis"²³ and their names was questioned, she could not conceal the glee of witnessing a new country with the airports clad in snow and experiencing a new sense of freedom in a new land.

²¹ SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive) is a non- profit organization which documents stories and materials of South Asian Americans. It is based in Philadelphia, USA.

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asian_American_Digital_Archive

²³ <https://firstdays.saada.org/story/sarmistha-bhattacharjya>

One more example of a young woman who had travelled from Bombay, India to Boston is Shanta Gangolli as a young bride. She had travelled from Bombay to the USA to accompany her husband who had come to pursue a fellowship in MIT, Boston. She later tried to pursue her dream job of teaching in Boston, when she got admitted to Boston University where she studied education for hearing impaired. She, then, went on to teach in a variety of institutions and schools with deaf children (Her life can be elaborately known in *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* by Amy Bhatt and Nalini Iyer.)²⁴



Fig. 3. Source: SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive)

“Migration scholars have divided migrants into two sub-categories; one is Individual migration and another is Family migration. With the individual migration, the focus is more on the male migrants who migrate on the basis of work, may it be skilled or unskilled, whereas the family migration always involves the migration of women along with the men. Marriage across borders usually notices changes in the legal status of the spouses and also the physical movement of spouses across the borders”. Initially, women have travelled for marriage to maintain the gender

²⁴ <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/saohc/id/111/>

imbalance which is created by the men who migrate alone for economic purposes. The deployment of American soldiers during World War II led to the implementation of the 1945 *War brides Act*, which helped in the ushering of marriage migrants from various countries to the United States (Yuh, 2003). Similar to the example which I have illustrated above of Sarmistha Bhattacharya, women after marriage have reported a number of reasons to find a husband abroad- a strong desire to travel abroad, experience a different world, a sense of adventure. Despite these reasons to migrate abroad, scholars have notified some other explanation for their migration; “women from developing countries seek husbands residing in developed countries who can provide them with economic security”.

Apart from all the apparent socio-economic and cultural lavishness that the women experience after marriage in a new land, there are many obstacles that they face after migration. The obstacles or disappointments can be enumerated as domestic violence, cultural barriers, loneliness, depression and immigration laws which are mostly favourable for the natives of the country. “International marriage migration creates opportunities for women, but marriage migrants also become vulnerable to many issues such as being minorities, second class citizens or as newcomers. Scholars have also started identifying the female migrants and their issues which challenges social inequalities such as gender, class, ethnicity and race”.

2.8. Women of elderly age migrating to the USA

There has been a noticeable growth of Indian women immigrants coming to the USA belonging to the elderly age group. These women have experienced a totally different setup in establishing a new socio-economic condition in the new land of the USA. These elderly often find it difficult to carve out their own spaces in the new land where their children have already carved out their

own niches in the new land. According to Khandelwal (1997, 106), most of these elderly women are lured by their families to return home to India, whereas their children settled in the United States pull them to stay on in the USA. In one of her surveys, Khandelwal quotes her respondent, Uma, who is in her 60s and she and her husband plans to go back to India.

“It is futile to go back to India at this age. My husband has nourished this dream all his life ~ that on retiring, we will settle back in India. He has been investing in real estate there and has many friends and relatives in India. He is so impractical, he doesn’t know.

First of all, I am not going back to India to live with my in-laws and spend all my time socializing with my husband's friends.

I think we are fine here. Our children are settled here. They are married and have good jobs. It does get lonely in America, especially if you are used to an Indian family. But we have been very active in our community affairs and have lots of hobbies. It is impossible to turn back the clock”.

The themes of gender roles, tradition and changes have been much more visible in the lives of immigrant women. The elderly women have also changed their roles in respect of gender, class and ethnicity.

2.9. Migration of the working-class women

Since the implementation of the *Immigration and Naturalization Act* of 1965, the migration pattern has noticed that the mass of women who had migrated to the USA were mainly the skilled, professional immigrants which contributed to the labour force of the host country. “The

migrant population increased from 172,132 in 1970 to 286,120 in 1980 and 815,447 in 1980” (Census of Population: General and Social Economic Charecteristics(Washington DC, 1980), T-79; Census of Population: General and Social Economic Charecteristics (Washington DC, 1990), T-105).

As Indian women moved away from the domestic domain and entered the arena of professional work, they carved out new gendered identities for themselves as immigrants in a new society. This was usually observed with loss of domestic help, which in turn strongly influenced the “women’s desire to redistribute domestic tasks”. (Bhalla, 2008, 73). In this process, while women were busy framing their identities in the new found land, the women were also shifting their roles from housewives to professional and skilled workers. There had been noticed certain changes in the familial structure of the household of immigrant families. Most of the working women wanted a marriage which was more of equality based one. The women expected their husbands to work equally, helping them in their household chores, rather than behaving like a traditional chauvinist man ordering about the wife for all kind of household work. As for this setup, it has been observed “that women often complaint that men always prefer eating out rather than cooking in the house. At this junction, the men’s perspective should also be taken into account. Observations suggest that men who are settled as immigrants in the country outside the homeland, point out that women are the uncrowned queens of the Indian households, though men are considered the head of a traditional Indian family. They also observed that women were experts in cooking, cleaning and looking after children” (Jigyasu,1988).

According to the age old Indian tradition, women were expected to be docile and subservient, managing their roles as wives and daughters. Consequently, the working women who have to maintain both the outside realm and the household domain, had to face severe identity crisis in

maintaining both the roles, with their identity still rooted in their domestic roles. This has been noticed as one of the most important problems in the lives of the immigrant women in the USA.

As has been noticed, the migration of highly skilled men among transnational borders is quite widespread. In the 20th century, the migration of men is often linked to the development of “post-industrial economies in the West”. The first phase of migration started in the 1950s and lasted till the mid-1970s. Most of this skilled population headed towards U.K, U.S and Canada. The second phase of migration, which began in “the mid-1970s, witnessed a large amount of people emigrating to the Gulf Oil economies of the Middle East”. It has been recorded, that an estimate of 57 percent migrants were from the professional category in 1975, whereas “88 percent in the previous period from 1971-1975” (Nayyar, 1994). Deepak Nayyar (1994) in one of his work has mentioned that of the total proportion of highly skilled migrants from all over the world to USA, “a considerable 19.5 percent Indians in period 1971-80, 13.4 percent in 1981-1990, added to the population. It is a known fact that the Indian state has always recognized the importance and role in shaping the economical future of India. These skilled migrants have moved for providing services to global information and technology. Many other political factors and policies have widely influenced the migration of skilled labour”. The major and prominent sectors that have gained opportunities are “medicine, science, technology and finance”. The scholarly studies, over the years have also tried to study the pattern of migration. The male migration is automatically followed by the female migration with the usual pattern of male migrants being followed by their family; which includes women and children. However, recent studies have observed that women migration has also been going through changes, be it skilled or unskilled. There has also been a noticed change in the female pattern of migration and how it has been creating its mark in its own field. Men, who migrate to other developed nations, often prefer

highly educated wives from their own countries. In most of the cases, it comes up as a backdrop for these highly skilled or qualified women who leave their careers and migrate to some other nation. Studies conducted by Purkayastha (2005) have observed that women who migrate as spouses are mostly dependants on their husbands. Since most of the female migrants amount as dependants on males, a very small portion contribute to the section of women who migrate as wives and consequently attempt to re-establish their careers after migrating. It has been observed that the Indian central Government, as well as the State Government, has made partnerships and networks with non-resident Indians (NRIs) in order to symbolize a new relationship between “the state, science and the market in India”. These sectors generally include telecommunications, electronic, commerce and information technology. Therefore, with the immigration of software labour promises to erase the barriers that existed between both countries. “India has expanded its pool of highly trained and cheap labour in order to attract foreign investment, which has been responded very well by the high level of investment, while the state has structured networks of labour and capital in states like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Chennai with their global networks established in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Silicon Valley and New Jersey”.

Most of the highly skilled male migrants have focused on professionals in corporate sectors, political assignments, highly educated professionals in the academic sector and medicine. Purkayaastha (2005) has enumerated various reasons for migration of skilled Indian women to the USA. Some of it is as follows: Women are very rarely chosen for international assignments.

- “Women are preferred more in ‘soft’ assignments in their home countries.
- There is no doubt on women’s performance in ‘upper level’ jobs, which, in turn, assign them not to be appointed in higher positions.

- In the Indian society, if a lucrative offer regarding migration pours in, the male is always preferred to take the chance, while the female is expected to sit back in the country and maintain the household expectations”.

The economic and political conditions of a country also shape the categorisation of skilled and unskilled labour. This also plays a determining role in recognising women’s migration as ‘housewives’ or highly skilled workers. There are sectors which are more open to women and minorities (for instance university jobs) which have opened up ways to help the migrating women to re-build their careers. Migrating women are often expected to look after the household, which in turn poses a threat in pursuing their careers. The women face more barriers than men. The migrant women also have to face disadvantages as they don’t get ready access to the support systems that facilitate careers of working women. Therefore, the disadvantages work cumulatively in political, work and home spheres for women at large.

The search for cheap labour across the globe has somewhat tried to make up for the shortcomings of women’s role in the field of highly skilled workers. The shortage of highly skilled workers in the field of medicine and engineering had to seek to attract cheap labour from developing nations like India.

Traditionally, women from Asia migrating to the USA have been considered as non-productive labour and the migration policies have witnessed severe changes affecting the paradigm of migration of South Asian women. However, the new scopes of work and globalisation have widened the field for migration of women and more women have been able to migrate as skilled workers.

As has been observed in many studies, high profile jobs or white collar jobs are not supposed to bear any kind of family responsibilities entrusted on their shoulders. “In the 1990s, as the restrictions on work and citizenship increased, the number of non-white immigrant women had also seized to decrease. Political and social factors also contributed to the changes in the labour size movement to the USA and recent women migrants, irrespective of their qualifications, become segregated from achieving migrants’ rights and benefits”.

Asian Indians in 1990: a profile

	Asian Indian		US		White
<i>4+ years college</i>					
All	58.0%		20.3		21.5
Male	65.9		23.3		25.0
Female	48.7		17.6		18.4
<i>Economic characteristics</i>					
Median earnings	\$49,309		\$30,056		\$37,152
% below Poverty	7.2		10		7
<i>Occupational characteristics</i>					
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Professional	38.5%	19.3	13.4	10.1	
Managerial	18.9	8.1	14.6	14.8	
Technical/sales	23.7	15.7	16.6	14.4	
Administrative support	9.8	17.2	7.5	24.6	
Service	7.3	9.0	11.3	15.1	
Precision craft	7.8	2.1	21.0	2.1	
Operative labourer	11.6	6.8	22.5	7.6	
Farming/Fishing/forestry	0.9	0.2	4.2	0.8	

Fig. 4. Source: US Bureau of Census (1990).

Derived from *Skilled migration and Cumulative disadvantage: the case of highly qualified Asian Indian immigrant women in the U.S* by Bandana Purkayastha, *Geoforum*, Vol 36, Issue2, March 2005, pages 181-196

Year Asian Indians (per ACS)

2005 2,319,222

2006 2,482,141

2007 2,570,166

Year Asian Indians (per ACS)

2008	2,495,998
2009	2,602,676
2010	2,765,155
2011	2,908,204
2012	3,049,201
2013	3,189,485
2014	3,491,052
2015	3,510,000
2016	3,613,407
2017	3,794,539
2018	3,882,526
2019	4,002,151
2020	4,021,134

Fig. 5. Derived from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_Americans

As I have derived figures from Purkayastha's (2005) research, the above figure denotes the increase in the migration of Indians to the USA. Although the migration to the USA from India commenced since the 17th century, scholars did not concentrate on female migration. The reasons of migration differed in the early stages whereas the contemporary migration bore different reasons.

Most of the migration that occurred from India to the USA was to ease the financial flows between the West and India. “Between 1983 and 1990, interest rates in India were higher compared to the other countries in international markets. The balance of payments became acute with the oil crisis from Iraq’s invasion from Kuwait”. The Indian Diaspora had been playing a major role in earning remittances from all the other countries where they are based. Therefore, it has been established that the Indian Government pays due respect to the Indian Diaspora in shaping the nation’s economic structure.

One of the foremost “reasons for the migration was the search for more lucrative and polished jobs for the highly skilled personnel from institutes like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) remodelled after MIT. These institutes created highly skilled and qualified engineers who were in search of lucrative opportunities”.

2.10. Remittances from the Diaspora

Earlier studies considered migration as ‘brain drain’, whereas contemporary studies claim that the Diaspora not only contributes to the remittances but also contributes to the socio-economical domain of the society. (Newman 2004). According to the Economic Times²⁵, the USA and the Gulf nations contribute most of the remittances to India. Indians form 6 percent of the “foreign-born population, making them the second- largest immigrant group” in the USA. “The remittances sent to India increased to about \$83.1 billion in 2019. The rate of remittances has increased by 55 percent since 2010”²⁶. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, the remittances may have decreased since many Indian Diaspora have lost their jobs.

²⁵ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/forex-and-remittance/india-was-the-top-recipient-of-remittances-worldwide-in-2018/articleshow/70310386.cms>

²⁶ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states-2019#Remittances>

2.11. Gender, migration and identities

With the above study being conducted primarily on women migrating to the USA, critical perspectives come into the highlight. “The inclusion of gender studies in migration started as early as the 1970s and early 1980s with conceptualizing gender as ‘an individual-level, static category determined at birth’ (Nawyn, 2010). As the field evolved, the social scientists shifted their study from studying women to studying gender as a system which was effectively influenced by migration. More advanced studies stated that “gender as a constitutive element of migration” and also “gender permeates a variety of practices, identities, and institutions implicated in immigration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003,9).

The field of gender studies has tried to explore the myriad reasons behind the migration pattern of men and women. Studies have observed how shifting gender relations within families have paved ways for new patterns of female migration. Some other feminist studies have also stated how men’s and women’s roles have changed according to the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the homeland and the host countries. Most of the migrants are observed to enter a new country on the basis of economic opportunities and most of the migration literature is based on labour migrants. Contrary to the popular belief of men forming the majority of labour migrants, feminist scholars have noted that reasons for men’s migration differ in case of women. The entire process of migration starting from the decision to migrate, settling in the host country and adapting oneself in the host country entirely depends on gender relations. Similarly, feminist migration scholars have unveiled various push and pull factors that lead to migration patterns for women. Immigrant women’s migration pattern not only depends on the economic opportunities in the host country but also on the economic opportunities of the homeland (Donato,1992). There is a noticeable change in the pattern of women migrating internationally. “This process has been

observed as an increasing feminization of migration in the world and this is much more prominent after the introduction of restrictions on labour migration in Europe in 1973-74".(Morokvasic 1984)

There are innumerable sectors which prefer women workers rather than men. The sectors would primarily be "domestic care, light manufacturing" (Espiritu, 1997) which has preferred women as a more profitable source of labour rather than men. Other than economic factors, some other non-economic factors have also been noted for the migration of women. The various reasons that have been enlisted for migration are either "fleeing from violence in the household, specific violence from the partners or from widespread systematic violence that generates a flow of migrants" (Hyndman, 1998, Coven, 1995). International marriage markets have also aggravated women's migration across borders. There are innumerable women who have migrated only on the basis of marriage or as "mail order brides" from countries like the Soviet Union, South Asia, and Latin America (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). "These instances of migration bear resemblance with labour migrants who have been moving across borders on the basis of moving to wealthier countries from their own nations". Women have always resembled as carriers of culture and this is one of the main reasons of women migrating as brides from one country to the other with their spouses.

Most of the gender studies in migration also focus on the status of the family and the migrants after the migration. Their ways of settling down and adapting to the new cultural norms in the new country also bring one migrant and the family to face new challenges after migration. This, in turn, shapes the family traditions and norms of the family and consequently, family ties which get affected by the economic patterns and shifts.

It has been observed in the wide range of literature on gender and migration that women, still has been highly ignored. Perhaps, this is caused by the non-feminist scholars who tend to ignore the studies of feminism in migration studies. They don't take women or their experiences seriously or give much scholarly attention to them. As Lawson (1999) suggests, it has been difficult to capture the "massive arena of gender through quantitative data, and thus the other measures which are used to measure or detect the studies of feminist studies in the field of migration at large". Most of the sociological journals in the USA focus on the reasons for migration and the economic well being of the migrants in the host country. This, somehow, implies the importance of migrants in the USA and how they prove beneficial for the Americans (Ported and Rambaunt, 2006). "It has also been studied that North America is one of the countries that has witnessed the least integration of feminist studies in migration research. Many scholars have ascribed that gender is more than an individual level aspect granted at birth. It is a system of power that permeates throughout the migration procedure".

One of the most important evolutionary aspects of feminist studies in migration has noted this belief that the studies explore the transnational landscape of gender and power. It further breaks down the binary of gender by placing gender practices within social aspects of race, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Therefore, it has been argued that women move from one patriarchal system to another patriarchal system. Within this framework of migration, besides facing and overcoming new barriers in the host country, they also open up to new and fresh opportunities, which in turn, find new ways to negotiate for additional power. In this context of power and gender, we should obliterate the women's access to citizenship in the new country. There have been studies conducted on the same by Benhabib and Resnik (2009) who brought about the gender theory to bear upon citizenship and migration studies.

Another important aspect of migration theory would focus on gender and identity formation after migration. It has been observed by Gina Bujis in her book *Migrant Women- Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities* (1993) how gender relations change over time and space. Another critic, Parminder Bhachu (1993) has also pointed out in her essay called *Identities Constructed and Reconstructed: Representations of Asian Women in Britain* the docile and obedient nature of South Asian women, where they obey to the stereotypical patriarchal system. She analyzes gender, ethnicity, region and class together in her essay. As Bhachu (1993) has elaborated on the condition of women in Britain, in my endeavor to study the Indian women in the USA, it has also been observed that the condition of women has almost been the same after migration. The question of identity has been a prominent one in the context of Diasporic women, where they often feel isolated and depressed. As has been explained earlier, that women have been migrating as dependents on males, the situation has changed in the recent years where women have also been migrating as highly skilled professionals or students.

One of the latest studies in feminist studies of migration involves the study of women involved in sex trafficking. "Sex trafficking has become one of the major components for migration of women across borders. Despite its growing importance, the business of sex trafficking is not widely incorporated in the migration literature. This pattern of migration has also found its place amidst the category of labour migration". Despite the recent trends on research in migration studies, this area is highly neglected, where this area can form an integral part of a study for violence on women and one of the reasons for uprooting women from their homelands and crossing borders. This area poses to be one of the most promising areas of research on feminist studies of migration, despite the problems it faces methodologically. Feminist migration scholars are encouraged to work more on areas which present challenges in front of their research arena

and on the economics of migration. To be more specific, feminist migration scholars should work more on working on the argument that gender is more of an individual-level variable and more integration of gender studies to be made within the migration field of research. Feminist scholars have tried to craft out the different identities of a male and female in different spheres of life. Often the role of men is designated as the figure which handles the public domain and the female which dominates the home and its surrounding. Such a typical situation exists even if the woman is working outside the homely realm. As DasGupta in *A Patchwork Shawl* (1998,173), notes, for Indian immigrant women, “the home still remains a place to affirm one’s Indian-ness and the Indian woman is expected to be responsible for maintaining this Indian home in Diaspora by remaining true to her Indian womanhood” . It has also been argued upon that “it is the home and its cultural realm where the Indian immigrants often imagine their community in the USA, specifically in the mid- 1960s proceeding to the 1970s and further”.

While we talk about the self and identity in the Diaspora, we could also talk about the “normalizing of the self”. “The relationship between the self and the other can be defined in terms of ethnicity, race or religion, it can also distinguish itself between one normal self and deviant self. We discussed that the various acts of criminality, certain individuals can be termed as ‘deviants’. These deviants are usually considered as not normal (according to the societal norms) as they disrupt the normal functioning of the society. They are usually distinguished from normal or proper individuals, thereby marking the line of being a superior or inferior entity in society. The defiant self is, therefore, often defined as a separate community which deviates from the normal or dominant society and often is designated as the Other. These deviant communities, therefore, tend to follow the new sets of rules and designations conceived by them defining of what is deviant and what is normal”. Similarly, the Indian community in the USA tends to follow

some of the new designations formulated by them in the Diaspora to form a new and imagined community which helps them to co-relate with their culture, thereby assisting them to construct an identity in the Diaspora. Therefore, the identifying of the various communities causes them to secure the Other identity that is self-defined. In the Diasporic scenario, the individual identifies himself/herself in terms of ethnicity but resides in a different geographical location.

Talking about the concept of 'collective identity', Indians in the USA often consider themselves as a separate ethnic group within a multicultural society. This Indian community in the Diaspora, or for that matter, in the USA often has the tendency to find the immigrants along the different shores of the country. They establish an imagined community and somewhat tend to identify themselves with their Indian surnames or the presence of newspapers and weekly magazines such as *India Tribune* and *India Abroad* which have also tried to reconstruct the imagined community in the Diaspora. The nation plays a major role in establishing the identity of the migrant and it has been largely defined as "immigrant bourgeoisie class". Their ideas, values and culture always represent their nationality. In the Diaspora, "these classes of residents are generally termed as subordinate to the natives, mostly as a result of imperialism and colonialism; but on the other hand, these traits are highlighted mostly as a nationality rather than subordination because the immigrants are more educated and affluent. The USA had been considered as a melting pot earlier". Eventually, the 'salad- bowl' model replaced the melting pot theory, where people from different races and ethnicities became American without losing their own ethnic identity. (Niumai, 2021). These groups of Indians imply to put forth a union standard for all Indians to promote their cultural diversity, heritage and nationality.

Even as the Indians imbibe the best of the West- "practicality, assertiveness, technological know-how", they stick on to holding to their own culture and tradition. They hold on to their religious,

cultural and traditional beliefs and also try to impose the same on their offspring. While the nation, i.e; India stands for culture, tradition and nationality, the host nation promotes wealth, political success and prosperity. The immigrant tries to imbibe the best of both the worlds and in turn, stand out as the Indian-American though facing a number of issues related to identity and the making of the same.

The creation of the NRI community in the USA thereby establishes an Other for India and on the other hand, it also conveys the meaning for Indians residing in the USA. By defining themselves as a part of the Indian Diaspora in the USA, the Indians somehow relate themselves to the Americans and create a sense of equality with them. They also try to compensate for the feeling of alienation that the Diaspora face when they have to live outside the country and reassure themselves that life in America has taken them away from their roots and culture, but they are genealogically connected to the roots of their homeland.

Indian Diaspora and its cuisine: A study of finding culture and identity through the literary representations of the Indian Diaspora

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to review literature related to the Indian Diaspora, cuisine, culture and identity. The first part of this chapter discusses how the Indian Diaspora came in contact with several other cultures once they migrated to their host country. The demographic movement of the mass population across borders has contributed to the different facets of globalization. The native culture that the migrants leave at their homelands is generally portrayed as space where the ethnicity of the cultures is maintained. Whereas the movement of people across borders have brought them in contact with several other new cultures, resulting in the assimilation of various cultures and finding out their new identity. In this context, I would like to quote Ana M. Leon et. al (1999, 69) where she argued that, “Adjustment to a new culture encompasses an individual’s ability to adapt a language, different values, and new social situations and in some cases skills in coping with psychological problems stemming from the tension between the culture of origin and the new culture”.

Since this research focuses on the immigrants from India to the USA, it often succumbs to negotiations and new identities. This traditional picture of assimilating with the new cultures and creating an identity of their own in the new land creates a backdrop for the second generation Diaspora, who eventually try to replace their ethnic culture with the host culture. As people are increasingly moving out of their homes, it has become a part of modern life which deconstructs and constructs a new identity and people's lives while adapting to new cultures and traditions.

I would like to focus on two aspects of the immigrants viz; "expatriate and the immigrant". There has been a marked difference between an expatriate and an immigrant. "An expatriate bears the history of alienation and focuses on the country of origin. He/she dwells in the nostalgic past, whereas the immigrant celebrates his/her arrival in the new country. An expatriate also has a strong sense of being alienated, being unreal, his/her inability to accept the new society. They also feel that they have been ousted from their homeland to another new land disrupted from their own ethnic cultures, which in turn leave them lonely, experiencing pain, angst and fear. Thus, expatriation is a complex mindset, which is mainly characterized by failed dreams, unsuccessful conquests, the longing of the past, severe longing to go back home and disregarding the new self which is dislocated. There have been various instances of reported racism in the host countries; which, again creates a sense of rejection and humiliation for an expatriate, and this, in turn, forces them to cover himself/herself within a shell driving them away from adapting to a new culture". Sudhir Kumar Arora in Jain (2007) has beautifully interpreted the feeling of alienation of the Diaspora to an Indian bride, who after her marriage leaves her home and comes to her in-laws' house, where she also feels alienated and disrupted from her normal chord of life.

Unlike the expatriates, the immigrant gets involved in assimilating with the host culture and people around. The immigrant proclaims that the new found life is much more alive in their own world of existence. They feel that they are reborn with the capability of acquiring a new world. They submit themselves to the changes around them and get accustomed to the new environment around them. Nonetheless, the ability to assimilate and acculturate does not deny their roots of origin, it only suggests their power to give up their holding on to the past.

According to Said in one of his works, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he has quoted a 12th-century monk from Saxony Hugo of St. Vicar, where he describes the journey of his exile from home. The monk elaborates that the exile initially becomes “tender, eventually turning strong and then perfect. The person who finds his/her homeland sweet is still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong, but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place”. (Said 1993, 407).

The major themes discussed in the migrant literature are the issues discussed in the Diaspora. As has been defined by Toloyan in *Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies* (2007), the literature that is born out of the diasporic issues can be categorized as follows:

- “Emic Study- It deals with the diasporas who talk about themselves and
- Etic Study- It deals with the other non-Diasporas who talk about the Diaspora”.

The movement of people across borders has been categorized under two heads- forced migration and voluntary migration. The contemporary world witnesses more of voluntary migration rather than the forced ones as was observed in the classical Diaspora. The Diaspora across the globe has turned into a social phenomenon because clusters of people migrate across the world to earn, to study and differ from the people who were forcibly sent away to faraway lands to work. Home

for the classic Diaspora had turned out to be an illusionary concept where they could not return back, and the urge to retain their ethnicity was severely noticed among them, whereas it was contradictory for the new age Diaspora who moved out willingly.

Irrespective of being a new age Diaspora or the classic Diaspora, they face the issues of identity. The Diasporic transnationalism is fast becoming the new order around the globe and this has marked its impact on the literature of the Diaspora.

As food studies have conquered a very wide area of criticism and representation in films and literature, it must be noted as one of the salient features that food is constructed in such a way within the rubrics of the narrative which pushes the narrative forward. As a film studies scholar, Laura Lindenfeld (2007, 7) notes: “food, meal, preparation and eating provide the central driving force for the meal’s narrative structure and thus provide excellent barometers to measure social hierarchies and relationships”.

One of the remarkable critiquing of the treatment of food in Asian American literature is that it ‘eroticizes’ the Diasporic life and their problems associated with their racialized and classed lives of the immigrants.

The Diaspora always faces the question of the lost identity, the question of “Who am I?” According to Jain (2007), there are two different phases of the Diasporic writers-

1. “The Temporal move- This phase signifies a look to the past and one step towards the future. Nostalgia, survival in the Diaspora and cultural assimilation are three major factors for determining this facet.
2. The Spatial move- the other space is a space where there is a loss of tutorial space and cultural gain in a new land”.

3.1. The Diaspora in fiction

A notable size of the Indian Diaspora has occupied a considerable portion of the country. There are many fiction writers of Indian Diaspora, who has acclaimed fame worldwide. Among the many notable writers of Indian fiction in the Diaspora, I would like to name a few women writers viz: Bharati Mukherjee who has won the national book critics circle award in 1988, Jhumpa Lahiri who has won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 and Kiran Desai who has won the Man Booker prize in 2006. “The fiction of the Indian Diaspora constitutes a major portion of the contemporary Indian literature”.

Primarily the “Diasporic novels deal with the shifts of moving in and moving out of the cultural dilemma that is present in the Diaspora. These form uniqueness in the fictions of the Diaspora. Their identities often blend with their feelings of homelessness, confused identity and the equal urge to acculturate and assimilate in a new land. The double cultural experiences an idea of a lost homeland, the deterritorialization, racial discrimination, language problem and cultural shock form the main motifs of the representation of the Diaspora”.

A major portion of English fiction comprises of literature from the Diaspora. It has become one of the major genres of contemporary English fiction. A large number of Indian Diasporic writers have always been defined as an expatriate, transnational or immigrant writers, with their capabilities of being multicultural and ‘border intellectuals’. The Diasporic writers are observed to be writing in their adopted languages and show their sense of “belonging to their new cultures”. The writers of the Indian Diaspora are deeply rooted in their own cultures and we find them taking up the issues of their land and the issues of diasporic sentiments globally and representing it through their cultures. Whether they are the first generation immigrants or the

second generation immigrants, all experience the issue of the dilemma of in-betweens. The Diaspora writers are caught between two worlds and this double identity nullifies their sense of belonging to both the location. The Diaspora is always noticed as the being who are uprooted from the native cultural traditions and values, thereby creating a new identity in the hostland. This condition of not belonging anywhere further leads to alienation, a desire to claim the past with the inability to move back to the homeland. “The writings of the Diasporic authors are characterized with hybridity, creativity and experiments with languages”.

The characters and themes in their books constitute “minority discourse”. In an interview with Russell Schoch, Bharati Mukherjee said, “The original heirs of the American Dream encounter us on a daily basis: We are their doctors, their golf heroes, their filmmakers, their spouses and lovers. ‘We’ and ‘they’ have fused into ‘us’... that’s the two-way transformation....” (Bharati Mukherjee, interviewed with Russell Schoch, A conversation with Bharati Mukherjee: An American novelist, born in India, talks about crossing borders, improvising identities, and transforming cultures, alumni. berkeley. edu. California Alumni Association, Web, 2007).

A large number of Indian diasporic writers have emerged in the post-colonial period in the world literary scene. With reference to the study of Diaspora in the post-colonial period, I would like to quote Rebecca Walsh (2003,2), where she quotes, “The study of Diaspora is frequently inseparable from the study of postcolonialism and imperialism in its various forms”. The themes of post-colonialism form the core of the study in the field of Diaspora. “Postcolonial theories generally discuss the themes of gender, race, place, migration, representation and multiculturalism which always finds a place in the study of migrant literature”. The immigrant literature has brought forth issues of transnational scenarios of immigrants and their conditions in the Diaspora. “Migrant scholars have repeatedly, brought forward the issue of the transnational

and ethnic identity of the Diaspora and also emphasize that they are never bound by geographical borders or territories, but they are more open to assimilate and carve out a new identity". The theories of transnationalism and postcolonialism share some common features in immigrant literature. With this thought in mind, it would be apt to quote John McLeod (2000), when he said that postcolonialism posed, challenges from the colonized mass and looking at new avenues to see and give voice to the colonized people. They resort to self-discovery either by digging the history or conforming to memories. The Indo-American community is mostly observed to be the neglected portion in the society, and this negligence has been maintained by the politicians and the social historians. This negligence has been forcibly challenged by the women diasporic writers, who are basically the products of two cultures and they try to "move from margin to centre... to an empowerment of themselves". This, in turn, motivates for a change in the American cultural and literary scenario. The space of the women writers in the Diaspora have turned positive and proved advantageous for the Diaspora. This scenario has changed quite a bit in the Diaspora where about "three million Indians in the Diaspora in the USA and about thirty million scattered all over the world, the Indian Diaspora has created a niche for themselves". They are found everywhere and have marked their identities in alien lands, making their country proud of their abilities and achievements.

In one of the writings by Gosain (2018) it has been observed that the Indo- Anglian writers who are the immigrants have flourished and been bestowed with awards and acclamations worldwide in the literary scenario. She also opines that expatriation also leads them to lack empathy for their native land. However, she also recognizes the fact that Indian Diasporic writers are performing a task that is befitting their own country and the adopted land, ultimately leading them to recognize themselves and re-construct an identity for themselves.

Apart from bearing the nostalgic reminiscences, the more prominent feature of the Diasporic writers would be the “act of recreating the past”. As M.G. Vassanji (1989, 63-67) says, “this reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing. Having reclaimed it, having given himself a history, he liberates himself to write about the present”. The postcolonial theorists including Bill Ashcroft (2006) opined how “English has formed a dominant language in the world of literature. He had said earlier that the English educated upper class were more privileged and educated, thereby adopting English as the main language to write their literature. There have been observations regarding the migrant literature from across the world where the authors have been writing in other languages to pen down their thoughts and feelings about being an immigrant. This category of literature has been categorized as independent literature and this depends on the abolition of a restrictive power which cuts off the assertions from a different perspective. This sets them apart and classifies the characteristic as postcolonial literature, and again repeatedly found in migrant literature”.

Boundaries are extravagant and the crossing of borders and mixing of cultures have become the trend of the society in contemporary times, thus bringing in the production of new and cosmopolitan communities worldwide. It has been again, observed that the literature of these communities which incorporate their feelings, ideas, passions and lifestyle is also gaining prominence very rapidly. This creates exemplary events and inspires the population across the globe. “The human race is no longer confined to the geographical boundaries; they think of a borderless, cosmopolitan world where there is an easy intermingling of people, their races and cultures. With the help of advanced technology and science, man is able to keep a track of everything occurring around the world and can plan or arrange their lives accordingly to keep pace with the whole world”. The immigrant writers have been highly influenced by globalization

or transnationalism. “Immigrant characters in most of the literary works of the 1980s and 90s are characterized by the diversity, heterogeneity, flexibility and the urge to construct a new identity”. Besides trying to retain their ethnic identity, they also cherish their new found identity in the Diaspora. Therefore, the immigrants are constantly reinventing their own identities to adjust to a new multicultural world.

3.2. Women writers in the Diaspora

“My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character. They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life- its shapelessness, its meaninglessness”. ----
Anita Desai²⁷

Irrespective of women moving on in their spheres of lives, “family to women still holds prior position; whereas men regard family as a place to return back from stress and seek solace. Family is often considered a very sacred place, where a man defends for it and a woman is expected to nurture it”. According to Okin (1982, 74), the men and women always had different roles in a traditional family. Women were always considered as “creatures of sentiment”, whereas men were considered as figures who represent their families “in the political realm”. A writer generally writes out of the many thoughts, confusions and contradictions that he/she faces. “The novel is misread as a feminist novel, most of the times. While reading a novel by a female author, it should always be kept in mind that an author is primarily an author irrespective of the gender. She is firstly a writer and then a woman”. The indicators of feminism need to be removed while reading the novels written by women authors.

²⁷ <https://biography.jrank.org/pages/4263/Desai-Anita-Anita-Desai-comments.html>

To be specific, Desai's heroines in the novels hail primarily from affluent families, with no worries of their sustenance. The female characters focusses more on the inner or mental states of themselves, which provides deeper insight in creating the feminine sensibilities.

Shyam A, Asnani (1985, 143) states:

“Desai is interested in social or political probing, the outer weather, the physical geography, or the visible action like Kamala Markandayaa and Nayantara Sahgal. Her forte is the exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind, and bringing into relief the hidden contours of the human psyche.”

As James Clifford (1997, 314) theorizes, the diasporic women are “often caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex and strategic ways”. The selected authors in this chapter have also tried to discuss the problems of the migrant women and their diasporic settings by representing the challenges faced by the migrant women and how women has always been forced to be the barriers of culture and how to maintain their cultural identity through the varied representations in the novels through their ethnic cuisine. The women authors; especially the new generation Diasporic female authors have tried to focus on a number of women migrants as the protagonists in their works, from the displaced wives of academics or professionals to a single woman who had come to carve their own identity.

The female diasporic authors and their novels have found less relevance and importance in the academic sphere for further discussions. Since the inception of writing of literature by the diaspora, it has always been men who have found prominence in the sphere of writing. Though in recent times, we have witnessed a lot of female authors who have entered this arena and

gained importance in this field. Totaram Sanadhya, an immigrant from Fiji started writing his memoirs. David Dabydeen, V.S. Naipaul and the like were also remarkable male authors.

Vijay Mishra in his book , *Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007) has written a number of records where men were found to be more in number while representing their lives in the diaspora. With the change in migration pattern and women pouring in the Diaspora, many educated women tried their hands in writing and then emerged as the new contributors of Diasporic literature.

Some of the notable female authors of the Diaspora would be Kiran Desai, (b.1971), the daughter of Anita Desai, who was born in Delhi, but had migrated to the UK before migrating to the USA. Jhumpa Lahiri (b.1967) was born in London, but later moved to the USA with her parents when she was two years old. Her novels echo the tales of the traditional Bengali families who migrate from Calcutta to the US. Her novels have made her a successful literary figure in the contemporary times. Some other notable women authors also include Monica Ali (b.1967), who was born in Dhaka, but currently lives in London. Her novels have focused on Asian- British women and their contested lives. The fiction based on the South Asian Diasporic women have been highly undermined. The South Asian women writers have “a diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds and this is reflected in their works of fiction. Whereas some of the authors have always preserved their ethnic background by presenting the characters and the scenario in the pre determined cultural context, other writers have come forth with a varied cultural and ethnic background for their characters and scenario”. Reading ethnic literature and grasping the ethnicity has represented women and their lives after migration. In this context, it would be apt to quote Deepika Bahri (2004, 206), when she says, “the development of critical ways of reading is just as important as the use of writing to represent women; a particular representation may be

misread as representative of entire culture by consumers of ‘Third World fiction’. She also states that reading post colonial feminist writings requires one to read the literary representations of women, especially the women of South Asia” (in this context).

The genre of literature in India has been crowded with women authors since nineteenth century. Some of the prominent Bengali pioneer writers namely “Begum Rokeya Sakhawat (1880-1932), Shashi Deshpande (b.1938), to name a few; had started writing about the atrocities after the Partition of India. The writing style and themes have changed with new writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and the like coming to the forefront and writing about the lives of women residing in a new formed country after the partition”. Gradually, with the migration process taking pace, writers like Bharti Mukherjee, who paved the way for British and American influences in Indian fiction. The writers of the Diaspora, therefore, successively, have formed a larger part of the English literature genre, with other women authors coming to the forefront and representing women and their lives in the Diaspora.

The women authors, namely, Shobha Narayan, Anita Desai, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni and Bharti Kirchner belong to the different ages of writing fiction in the Diaspora. They have tried to trace the female lives after migration. The stories of the protagonists in the novels that I have discussed below are stories of Indian- American women and how they have managed to carve out an identity for themselves in mixed categories of “caste, ethnicity and culture”. The authors have formed a formidable part of the Diaspora, and have tried to represent the lives of the women by forming strong female protagonists in their works of fiction and the way they carve out their cultural identity through the representation of their cultural cuisines.

3.3. Food in Fiction

Memories of food are evoked only when an individual becomes an immigrant. For an Indian immigrant, his/her “naturalization into American citizenship minoritizes her identity”. (Radhakrishnan 2003, 121). The disinterest in food that one faces while at home; transforms itself into a new feeling. After migration, one is discarded of his/her homeland. The only residue left of homeland is the memory of the home. The feeling of displacement and dislocation urges the migrants to cling to their memories and recreate and remember the memories. The migrant feels the desire to embrace what is left of the past; when they are geographically displaced. The inability to return to their homelands becomes prominent with the sense of displacement. The Diaspora tries to relate to these memories with the help of innumerable factors. The culinary idiom plays a crucial part in reflecting the lost memories of the past and reconnect with the home. Studying of culinary narratives must also be given a different dimension of defining national identity. The Diaspora feels a longing to reconnect with their homelands and food acts as a medium. The ample cookbooks, fiction reflecting the Diasporic sentiments of connecting with the homeland brings out the sentiments vividly. They reflect the “pangs of migratory displacement and the nostalgic feeling for their home”. As said by Sunaina Maira (2012,42), “critical nostalgia as a more reflexive form of nostalgia attuned to the politics of consumption. To consume culture in all its varied forms, or to be more nostalgic for cultural artifacts, is as much about imagining an inclusive future as it is about commemorating memories of the past.”

With reference to food in fiction, I quote Roger Bromley (2000, 1-2):

“Almost all the fictions are by, and concern themselves with, those for whom categories of belonging and the present have been made unstable as a consequence of the displacement enforced by post-colonial or migrant circumstances. Language, home, memory and

marginalization are recurring problems... The fictions speak of, from and across migrants identities and develop narratives of plurality, fluidity and always emergent becoming.”

Food bears a symbolic connection to the articulation of identity for the Diaspora. Most of the immigrants’ feelings of rootlessness and displacement come to terms when they find themselves with proximity to ethnic food. Most of the fictional characters are portrayed as those who connects themselves with their homelands and constructs identities through cuisine. As Homi Bhabha (1994, 45) had said,

“What is at issue is the new performative nature of differential identities; the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, opening out, remarking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference-be it class, gender or race. Such assignments of social differences-where difference is neither one nor the other but something else besides, in between- find their agency in a form of the “future” where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present.”

A new sect of Asian American authors have come into being, where they only try to re-create or cater to the needs of mainstream readers who sit for gulping down “narratives about racial and ethnic difference”. As has been stated by Mannur (2009, 84), “The culinary- themed novels becomes positioned as a more palatable and acceptable mode of representing difference precisely because it is anchored in a culinary idiom, but also because it functions as a commodity, thus furthering the notion that literature by and about minoritized subjects is necessarily enjoined to a consumptive understanding of racial and ethnic difference”.

Within this genre of literature, we also find the sub-genres of food writing. The Asian American food writing might go to be described as “spiced with the flavour of exoticism or excessively sugar-coated” (Mannur 2010, 86). As Ketu Katrak (1997) suggests, “minority writers often find a marketplace for themselves who are interested in consuming products which appeal to them in the cultural context”.

The food-themed novels often structure a frame where the background of the plot is neither political or they refer to a certain theme which is highly acceptable to mainstream Americans. “These culinary-themed novels put up a theme that food is the constant commodity in the market which connects the culinary to the existing cultural practices”. Therefore, we might conclude that food writing is “a form of minor literature, catering only to the tastes and desires of mainstream readers who generally wish to consume some narrative which proves delicious in a different sense”.

The novels that I have chosen for analysis are *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, *Feasting Fasting* (1999) by Anita Desai, *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir With Recipes* (2003) by Shobha Narayan and *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* (2003) by Bharti Kirchner. The novels mentioned above have prioritized the role of migrant women and food as the main themes of the novels. Prior to analyzing the novels for further discussions, I would like to summarise the novels and their respective authors.

3.4. Biography of the authors

Here I would like to elaborate on the biography of the authors whose novels I have discussed and analysed in this chapter. The female authors have migrated to the USA and form a prominent part of the Indian- American community.

3.4.1. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956- present)

“Food is an important symbol. It’s particularly important for immigrants as the one thing they hope to be able to carry forward that’s relatively easy to recreate, although it was much harder in the early days when there weren’t many Indian groceries. Immigrants learned to make substitutions, like using Bisquick for *gulab jamuns*²⁸, tricks like that. I’m interested in food in my personal life, too. But food exists on many levels in my books. It reflects changes in our culture as we take shortcuts in how we cook our food, how it remains a comfort regardless.”²⁹

“Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a short story writer, poet, novelist, essayist, columnist and blogger. She holds a post of Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Apart from teaching creative writing, she is also the co-ordinator for a helpline of South Asian women”.

Tracing her roots to West Bengal, India, Divakaruni, herself is an immigrant, after migrating to the USA to study. Many of “her novels are framed in the form of a bildungsroman, where the protagonist, or rather the female protagonist is on a quest for finding her self identity and her roots”. She is the author of several award-winning volumes of poetry, and several novels namely, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004). Coming from a traditional family in India, Divakaruni had the experience of being an immigrant. She had found it extremely difficult and challenging with the world changing around her after she migrated to the USA. She had also said

²⁸ An Indian sweet consisting of a deep- fried balls boiled in sugar syrup.

²⁹ <https://www.guernicamag.com/sisters-and-spices/>

that, “Immigration was certainly a transformational experience”³⁰, and this has been traced in many of her writings.

3.4.2. Anita Desai (1937- present)

Anita Desai, born as Anita Mazumder, is an Indian novelist. She has been nominated for Booker Prize three times and has also been awarded the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). The oppression of women was the main theme of her first novel *Cry, The Peacock* (1973). Though some of her novels have been highly criticized, most of her novels have been praised. Most of her novels reflect the tragic view of life. While *Feasting Fasting* (1999) deals about the Indian and American connection, her novel *The Zigzag Way* (2004) tells the story of an American academic who travels to Mexico to trace his Cornish ancestry. Identity and loss has formed a formidable theme in some of her novels. Though a major part of her novels does not deal with diasporic themes, her novels have showcased themes of gender and identity. Desai has carved out the niche for the generation of writers of Indian descent or origin chiming in and around the world.

Anita Desai got married to Ashwin Desai, a business executive, and had four children Kiran Desai being her daughter, who won the Man Booker Prize in 2006. Anita Desai had taught at several eminent institutions like Cambridge, Oxford, Smith, Mount Holyoke and MIT. She is also the member of the Royal Society of Literature and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Desai lives in the United States with her family. Though she left India at a later part of her life, she does not consider herself as a part of the Indian diaspora, but she is certainly seen as one of the greatest literary figures of India in the contemporary times.

³⁰ <https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/in-search-of-the-self/article4650612.ece>

3.4.3. Shobha Narayan

Shobha Narayn is an award winning author, journalist and columnist. She is the author of the award-winning *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes* (2003) and has also written four other books. “Narayan writes about food, travel and culture and is a regular contributor at the Hindustan times. She had moved to the USA after getting married and has been living in the United States for a span of almost 20 years. She lived in New York with her husband and two daughters”. When asked about her experience as a migrant in the USA, she says, “I came to America as a tabula rasa. I was a young college student from a sheltered family who hadn’t the space or time to think about things. America taught me independence, feminism, and instilled a spirit of adventure and enterprise. I am who I am because of this country and I love America and its people for that reason”.

Beyond that, we carried back lots of memories. Fall in New England. My first snowfall.”³¹

Narayan’s books and writings have always contributed to the memories and experiences of an Indian migrant living in the USA. Her writings echo the voices of the immigrants and their struggles that they face each day to survive in a foreign land with the memories of food and the nation.

3.4.4. Bharti Kirchner (1940- present)

Born in Calcutta, India, Bharti Kirchner moved to the United States of America. She is an Indian- American author of nine novels and non-fiction work. “A native of India, Kirchner used her knowledge of Indian cuisine to launch her writing career. Bharti has written numerous articles on food, fashion, travel, fitness and lifestyle in magazines like *Food and Wine*,

³¹ <https://indianewengland.com/2018/01/qa-shoba-narayan-author-milk-lady-banglore/>

Vegetarian Times, Fitness Plus and Northwest Travel". Along with writing fiction, Bharti has also written cookbooks namely, *The Healthy Cuisine of India: Recipes from the Bengal Region* (1992), *Vegetarian Burgers* (1996) and the like. Prior to writing the books, she worked as a systems engineer for IBM and as a systems manager at Bank of America. Presently, she lives in the Greenlake neighbourhood of Seattle, with her husband, Tom.

Her novels namely, *Shiva Dancing* (1998), *Sharmila's Book* (1999), *Darjeeling* (2002) and *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* (2003) try to re discover the life of an immigrant. She also tried to present the lives of different women as she wanted to portray "how women from different social classes can respect each other". She had moved to the USA for pursuing further studies and had continued working in the corporate sector, until she felt the urge to leave her lucrative career and choose her career as a writer. As quoted from one of her interviews, where she says, "I started writing fiction in 1995. In times before me, the early immigrant literature, you often saw immigrants who had difficulty making it. They were often portrayed as victims. Reality now is different—immigrants and in many ethnic groups are highly educated; technologically savvy, brought here or they've come on their own because of their skills. They are doctors, teachers, scientists and entrepreneurs. This is the group I write about. These people are not victims. They create their own destinies. Sure enough, life isn't easy for them in a foreign environment. They fall, and they rise again."³²

³² <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/kirchner-bharti-1940>

3.5. Summary of the novels

At this stage, I have summarized the plot of the novels that I tend to discuss and analyze.

3.5.1. *Monsoon Diary* (2003) by Shoba Narayan

In this unparalleled piece of writing, Shoba Narayan, narrates her life through meals. Her entire narrative is about her delicious accounts with food from childhood in South India (specifically Kerala), her college days in America, her arranged marriage in New York City and the frequent visits from her family.

Born in South India, Narayan begins with the Hindu rice-eating ceremony, traditionally held when a baby is six months old to mark the transition from liquids to solids. In the very first chapter, she talks about the rituals of rice eating ceremony of a baby for the first time and the various rituals associated with serving rice to a new born baby, which is followed in India. To be specific, here, Narayan, illustrates how rituals (generally linked with religion) effects the food practices in India. The preparation of *ghee* and its major importance in Indian food is widely described. Since she belonged to a vegetarian, South Indian Hindu family, her food practices varied from the rest. These food practices, in one way, define the culture of the family. Though she was just a few months old, when the ceremony took place; this is just a mere repetition of her mother's narration of the incident. The author, here, tries to bring out the differences that are practiced in food habits of an Indian child to that of an American child.

Gradually, Narayan, brings out the love and the warmth that she received at her maternal grandparents' home as a child. She fondly remembers the memories from her maternal grandmother's kitchen; the ample number of spices that she used, the cozy and happy childhood memories.

“Throughout her life, food was infused with greater and deeper feelings. This autobiographical novel is filled with memories and images from her life with food being the primary factor to create memories, relationships and opportunities”.

In one of the chapters, we find a very interesting account mentioned by the author, where the meal for the pet of the family was also designed by the prevalent cuisine of the family.

“Curiously, Teddy relished our food and remained a life-long vegetarian.”(Narayan, 2003, 33)

Narayan’s childhood memories are decorated with her images from her mother’s kitchen, where she was first introduced with the various spices used in the kitchen; and their daily uses in human life.

Another societal or cultural dimension that defines class in Indian societies is caste. Though caste is not a very good term to signify the classes of people in the society and it is not a very good term to be used in contemporary Indian and American societies, but Indian families still identify themselves by caste. Indian food, is again set in standards by another form of identification, i.e; caste. This vast topic sets the rules of foodways for people belonging to different castes in India.

She also pays special attention to the difference in beverage consumption throughout India. People hailing from North India tend to consume tea “be it milky chai with ginger and cardamom or plain Lipton- South India drinks coffee.” (Narayan, 2003, 51) Though appreciative of her heritage, Narayan wanted to study in the USA, which her parents reluctantly allowed her only after she passed the test of preparing a delicious meal and serving it to her family. “A smell can

carry a memory, and certain foods can compress the memory of an entire childhood into them.”
(Narayan, 2003, 51)

Food resides in the memories of the Diaspora. It enlivens the sense of belonging and the attachment that they feel towards their homeland. The Diaspora leaves their homeland; but the traditions remain etched within them. Curry leaves, form an essential ingredient of South Indian cuisine, and since the author hails from the southern part of India, she is reminded of this particular ingredient as she mentions, “There are transplanted *maamis* who now live in Washington D.C, growing giant curry leaves inside their homes”. (Narayan, 2003, 54)

Reference has also been drawn to one of the instances, when years after leaving India, the author is drawn to a shop by the smell of innumerable spices, which transported her to her homeland.

“I find myself wandering over, drawn by the smell of cumin, cloves and cardamom. I frown in confusion. A Caucasian making *pav-bhaji*³³? (Narayan, 2003, 67). Culture; especially culinary culture, varies from people to people and across countries. With stepping in America, Narayan gets a first glimpse of the American culture and how it differs from Indian culture. “It was at Mary and Doug’s house that I got my first glimpse of American family life, the soap and suds of it, the gentle grace of setting a table with fork and knife rather than baldly eating with our hands as we did back home; the carpet and ruffled curtains; and ‘my’ bedroom upstairs which smelled of linen and rose potpourri”. (Naraya, 2003,113). In chapter 11, named ‘Holiday Trips’, the author goes on to innumerable trips to her friends and colleagues’ house, where she takes a tour of manifold dishes and comes close to the meaning of the term ‘globalism’. “On Christmas eve, we stood in her warm kitchen, brushed metal butter on phyllo sheets for a rich cheese

³³ An Indian fast food from the state of Maharashtra which consist of curry served with bread roll.

strudel, and mixed noodles, eggs, and raisins into a fragrant kugel, scented with vanilla essence and cinnamon.” (Narayan, 2003, 127)

Narayan got to be steady in her cooking skills when she created a dinner to raise funds for her tuition. Her idea of globalism again came to her mind, with Doug’s idea of the concept of “world cuisine”. With immigrants pouring in America, this was a new and contemporary issue to be dealt with. Therefore, the benefit dinner was more of an integration of cuisines from different cultures of the respective countries. With the mix and match of Indian cuisine with cuisine from different cultures, we also come across the first instances of globalization.

“Japanese *umeboshi* paste was about the same color as cranberry sauce. I would flavor it with Asian ingredients like wasabi, lemongrass and *galangal*.”(Narayan, 2003, 142) As most Indian husbands in Diaspora, went to work, the housewives took to culinary experiments. Similar things happened with Narayan, just after she started living with her husband in Connecticut. On the contrary, her husband disliked her experiments with fusion cooking (Indian cuisine with international ones). Therefore, she restored her simple Indian dishes. “I replaced the wasabi with asafetida, the soy sauce with tamarind, the soba noodles with basmati rice, the *umeboshi* paste with mint chutney, and the spaghetti with vermicelli.” (Narayan, 2003, 194) The author replaced her fusion cooking with Indian dishes, “using childhood memories and hastily written recipes” as her guide.

At the end of this book, the author conveys her feelings as to how she connects her memories in her homeland with food. “When I discovered that I could duplicate the flavors of my childhood, I realized how much I missed them and how much I enjoyed creating them.” (Narayan, 2003, 195)

This novel is a concoction of emotions of leaving the homeland and trying to connect with the homeland with food and its memories. The stories and the memories of food have been very well narrated by Narayan. This process of trying to blend in with the host country and the process of self defining oneself as an Indian by the constant narration of memories which started from the author's childhood to her journey to the USA has brought out the extreme passion and longing for home made food and the nation. The longing to attach herself with her own culture, despite migrating to the USA has been crafted in a well defined way by Narayan. Being a part of the Diaspora in the USA, Narayan has surely made her own story stand out of the lot by narrating her own stories, thereby making it a delightful piece to read.

3.5.2. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) by Anita Desai

Written in 1999, “a wonderfully knit novel in two parts, moving from the heart of a close-knit household, with its restrictions and prejudices, its noisy warmth and sensual appreciation of food, to the cool centre of an American family, with its freedom and self-denying attitudes to eating”. The first part focuses on Uma, the elder daughter of the family, who still lives at home, frustrated in her attempts to escape and make a life for herself. Her Indian family is difficult, demanding, but mostly, good-hearted. Despite her disappointments, Uma comes through as the survivor from an unfulfilled marriage. And in America, where young Arun goes as a student, women don't appear to eat or cook at all- seems terrifying to the young adolescent far away from home.

“This novel brings out the issues of lost isolation, identity crisis and attitudes towards food in two different countries. The first section of the novel has no similarity with the second section, wherein the life of isolated Arun is portrayed”. While the family is the central agent of individual socialization, Uma and Arun's upbringing demonstrates how rigid authority and parental control

can both arrest, in the case of Uma, and stifle, in the case of Arun, the individual realization of identity.

The first part of the novel tends to the family life of the household. Apart from Uma, the other characters appear to be bleak in this section. The parents also do not seem to have any names, as they are addressed as 'Mama' and 'Papa' throughout the novel. Uma's loneliness comes out as the theme in this section, where the significance of the women is prominent who were more concerned with kitchen and food.

Meals appear to form a significant part of the family. The household had three children, of which Uma was the elder daughter, followed by Aruna and finally Arun, their son. On her visits to Uma's place, Mira Masi was found to be crouching "at the outdoor hearth specially built for her with bricks and clay so that she could cook her own meals at a safe distance from the cook who laughed contemptuously in the kitchen where he fried onions and garlic and stirred the mutton curries and grilled the kebabs that made Mira Masi cover her mouth and nose with the loose end of her saree and choke". (Desai, 1999, 40-41) At the later part of the novel, when Arun, the son of the family, departs for USA, he writes frequent letters back home. Of the several letters that he wrote back home, one of the letters, that had struck him were-"The most personal note he struck was a poignant, frequently, repeated complaint. 'The food is not very good'". (Desai, 1999, 126). The second part of the novel looks into the isolated life led by Arun, away from home. Arun's acquaintance, the Patton family takes to some sort of judgment against him, when he refuses to eat meat. "Mrs. Patton begins to play the role of a distracting decoy. She flutters about the patio, helping herself to bread and mustard, pattering rapidly; 'Ahroon explained it all to us, dear- you know, about the Hindoo religion, and the cows'". (Desai, 1999,170)

In the Patton family, food holds no such sacred place, contradictory to what happens in India, as in Arun's family. For example, Mr. Patton grills fresh slabs of red meat almost every night, like almost all the other houses in the neighbourhood. Mr. Patton is unaware of the family's emotional needs, evidenced especially by Mrs. Patton and their daughter, Melanie. Mrs. Patton felt unloved and unwanted in the family, and, goes out to transform herself into a mother-like figure to Arun. She goes out shopping provisions for Arun, feeling delighted and eager to taste Indian vegetarian dishes. "We'll go down to the stores together", she was saying, "and stock upon- cereals, and-and spices and stuff. You can show me how to fix a vegetarian meal. It'll be my vegetarian summer; she ended with a delighted laugh". (Desai, 1999,184). Arun connected with his homeland through food. The food available abroad did not suit his digestive system and with this he was taken back to his carefree days at home; when delicacies were cooked and served in front of him. "How was he to tell Mrs. Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment? For the first time in his existence, he found he craved what he had taken for granted before and even at times thought an unbearable nuisance- those meals cooked and placed before him whether he wanted them or not (and how often he had or not), that duty to consume what others thought he must consume". (Desai, 1999, 188-189)

Anita Desai, here has specified to the diaspora, who are believed to be living in exile, people who are obsessed with the inability to understand each other in terms of culture. They try to carry their history or the past from one place to another and their failure in their endeavors has also disturbed the author. The Diaspora experiences have been given a boost in this novel, through the creation of the character of Arun, and his dealing with the diasporic life in the USA. In this novel, the nostalgic feelings for the homeland and adjusting to the new environment are the two

issues faced by Arun in this new land. His food patterns also seem to change, when he goes shopping for food with Mrs. Patton. This is absolutely new to him when he has to purchase canned foods. Arun, as a vegetarian receives the red meat and leaves it in the kitchen; specifies another instant where he has to adjust to a new environment.

Though this novel, is distinct in both the parts, they are not very well connected. Desai, here presents the diasporic formations or Diaspora experiences through the Indian customs, faith, religion, manners and socio-cultural attitude. She uses the character Arun to delineate the formation of the Diaspora and their experiences, away from their homelands. As an immigrant, he wants to be identified as Indian, vividly evident in his foodways.

3.5.3. *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni

This novel is set in Oakland, California.

“Indian grocery stores can seem intimidating with all those strange spices, unfamiliar vegetables, sacks of grains and smells of sandalwood, spices and incense.” (Bladholm 2000,12). The Indian grocery stores in the United States have also created their spells on igniting the longing for homelands for the migrants.

The novel tries to capture the tale of Nayan Tara (a flower that grows by the dust road) with “magic realism”. She is despised by her family for the sin of being born as a girl. With mysterious events piling up, she is delivered to the mystical island of spices, where she meets a mystical figure, whom she calls the ‘First Mother’. “She begins a new journey of priestly sisterhood of spice mistresses. Each of the mistresses was sent out into the world to help others, offering magic potions of fennel, peppercorn, lotus root and the like”. Nayan Tara (renamed as Tilottama; Tilo) chooses to be the mistress in a spice bazaar; which is situated in a rough section

of Oakland, California- a tiny shop from which the new-aged Tilo is forbidden to venture out. With a new name and a new identity, she commits herself to mend the lives of the distressed; who comes to seek her help, including an abused wife, a troubled youth, a chauffeur with dreams of American wealth and a grandfather whose insistence on old world propriety may have cost him his relationship with a beloved granddaughter. “Tilo is in perfect sync with her duties until she meets Raven, an elusive American”.

Divakaruni, in this novel, has tried to deal with a variety of topics in her novel- “issues of culture, identity, the immigrant and the diasporic experience and is a brilliant account of the protagonist Tilo’s journey from awareness to self-discovery. Tilo’s experience with the exotic Indian spices in a dusty old shop in Oakland provides Divakaruni the platform to speak to the heart of the American immigrant experience through the language of food (specifically spices)”.

Tilo, the protagonist, has undergone a drastic transformation. Her identity has revealed itself from her transformation from Nayan Tara to Tilo to Maya. From Tilo to Maya, “she mediates self-awareness into discovery as the spices become a mediator for understanding the innovative exploration with food”. This novel with self identity as one of the main factors comes with an autobiographical experience of culture and identity.

“The exotic East has paved their ways to explore their culture through literature”. Divakaruni, has also done the same in her novel. The particular field of study of food presented in literature has opened many avenues for interpretation and study. In India, food acts as a social, political and religious statement of personal belief, as well as a barrier between different cultures. This issue finds itself gaining huge importance in the immigrant experience. Food evokes the ‘memory’ that has been left behind in the homeland. While talking about food, we would be

talking more particularly about spices, as “spices remind us of a warm and exotic Indian experience”. The author here has presented a strong contact with spices and home, back in India. The spices, here, bear a strong motif, when each chapter is named after a spice that Tilo puts to some supernatural use in the narrative. The Indian store, namely, ‘The Spice Bazaar’ is a home away from home that evokes the comfort and familiarity of the homeland left far behind. Tilo’s occupation allows her to meet and help an array of people, especially the Indian immigrants. She understands “without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave behind when they chose America.” (Divakaruni, 1997, 63)

The novel rests within studies of Asian American literature. The narrative of Tilo constructing an arena that is built around routine activities like visits to Indian grocery stores and other foodstuffs evoking the emotions for ‘homeland’.

It packages ethnicity within an exotic ethnic framework. Constructed within a multicultural frame as it transforms the dusty immigrant enclave of the spice store into a terrain where the spices can resolve personal problems. Tilo is described as “an architect of the immigrant dream”. (Desai, 1999, 28) . The characters in the novel do not belong to the class of doctors, lawyers and recently arrived university students who yearn for their homeland. The characters in the novel are representations of the various sections of the society who have yearned to come to America for some dreams to achieve. The characters are Haroun, a cab driver who becomes a victim of a racially motivated attack; Lalita Ahuja, a wife who has been tortured by her husband; Jagjit, an alienated teenage gang member and an old grandfather who is stuck between tradition and modernity. Tilo saves them from all the hardships and the turmoils that they face after coming to America.

The novel by Divakaruni highlights major factors which are commonly visible in the lives of the Indian Diaspora community. Apart from Tilo, the protagonist and the “usage of magic realism”, Divakaruni has brought about many other characters who represent the daily diasporic lives led by the immigrants and how they adhere to the traditional beliefs and rituals that are practiced in their homeland.

3.5.4. *Pastries: A Novel of desserts and Discoveries* (2003) by Bharti Kirchner

Chefs are our unsung heroes of various culinary expertise exhibited in the kitchens. They are our heroes and heroines and cater to our daily ‘take out’ habits. Each day and night “they run meticulous, creative marathons, their glory and delight coming from the sight of familiar and new faces asking for a little more”.

The novel *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* narrates the life of a twenty-nine-year-old Indian-American woman named *Sunya*, inspired by the Sanskrit word *sunnyata*(emptiness). This novel narrates the journey of Sunya in her quest for her identity as a remarkable chef; specifically a baker, and in search for her lost father.

Sunya Malhotra, a second-generation migrant in America, is the head baker and owner of *Pastries*, a warm and cosy bakery in Seattle. Abandoned by her father, Prabhu Malhotra, Sunya struggled along with her mother, Deepika to grow up to be a successful baker and contemplating on the thoughts about Prabhu’s unexplained departure. The themes pervade all through the book, with Sunya struggling to carve an identity of her own and an unanticipated career threat. However, her dream of transforming herself into a fabulous baker is threatened by the chain bakery which opens down the street from her. To add to her misery, her Japanese boyfriend, Roger leaves her for a perfect Japanese girlfriend and her mother is engaged to a man whom she

abhors. The relationships in her life fade away with every phase in her life, but her love for baking and cooking remains immortal. After the relationship phase with Roger, her new relationship with a young film director, who has been working on to cover the World Trade Conference does not help her to overcome her worry about baking and holding up to the threatening circumstances posed by the bakery opposite to her store.

Her worries seem to end when she listens to the surprising event of enrolling herself for a new baking school in Japan, offered by her new Japanese baker. “The baking school in Japan is run by a famous Japanese baker, Mori Matsumoto, based on the principle of mindfulness”. It is here that Sunya finds her passion of baking and this helps her to learn the basic skills of baking all over again. Later, in the novel, it is also observed that Sunya finds her lost father in Japan. Her father, Prabhu Malhotra has turned into a saint and is known as Bhikkhu Karun, reveals himself in front of Sunya in Japan.

After her quest of acquiring baking skills and meeting her father, she returns to Seattle to her mother, but never discloses the events that had occurred in Japan. The ending ends on a rather happy note, when Sunya tries to reconcile with Dushyant, her mother’s fiancée and seek solace in her baking store, where she experiments and innovates her new found baking skills. Her dream of re-opening her store is fulfilled and the novel ends on a happy note.

Food in all the above mentioned novels plays a crucial role in framing the identity of the Diaspora. The protagonists in the novels are a formidable part of the Diaspora. They are mostly the first generation migrants, with one exception of Sunya, the protagonist of *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries*. The illustration of food and its associated factors that play a role in the diaspora, is the only means of representing the Diaspora in these novels. In *Monsoon Diary*,

the author depicts her life and narrates the incidents in her life through the journey that she made from India to the USA. Whereas, Tilo, the protagonist of *The Mistress of Spices* is symbolized as a perfect Indian woman who has brought the exotic Indian culture in the USA.

While the various novels have different stories to tell about the women who have carried their cultural baggage along with them to the Diaspora, I have tried to classify the analysis of these novels under the few sub divisions which are elaborated below.

3.6.Food and Nostalgia

Food acts as a social parameter that has defined and marked the women's territory in the country as well as the Diaspora. Though this notion has been argued upon in the chapters that follow this, the women in the novels have depicted their lives with the cultural connotation of food. In one of the essays by Ketu Katrak (1997), it has been mentioned that "culinary narratives are always permeated with a sense of belonging to the homeland and nostalgia". Food memories are considered the earliest memories that ignites the feeling of belongingness in the Diaspora, the craving to be an Indian and remain an Indian in the Diaspora. She also remarks, "my own memory banks about food overflowed only after I left India to come to the United States as a graduate student". She also elaborates,

"Food was not pleasurable to me as a child. Thinking about this now, as an adult, I can say that food was an overdetermined category for me in my childhood years; it tasted of the heady tropical environment, it delineated who was in and out of favour with my father. I tasted anxiety in the onions fried a bit too brown and tension in the too many dark burned spots on the roasted papad. One never knew what would be considered faulty at a

particular meal, and the uncertainty overwhelmed any pleasure in what was eaten.”
(Katrak 1997, 266-67)

At this point, I would like to mention that food is not just an emotion, it tries to bring out the semiotic value of food and how it has found its space in the literary studies and represented culture. The desire to remember home and the undaunted childhood memories are ignited by the culinary traditions that retains itself in the diaspora.

The authors of the novels discussed in this chapter have deep connection with India and bear a strong sense of belonging with their country of origin through their culinary traditions. Shobha Narayan, the author has grown up in India and spent most of the part of her childhood and adolescence in India connecting deeply with the Indian exotic culinary traditions practiced in her home and her grandmother's home. Similar to Narayan, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni has also grown up in India, and in most of her novels, food has found a prominent place where the migrant can connect their identity with the authentic food prepared in the diaspora. The other authors- Bharti Kirchner and Anita Desai have had similar allies with food. Both Kirchner and Desai have spent their childhoods in India. While Kirchner has strong linkages with food and it has been prominently displayed in her fiction as well as non fiction works, Desai is considered a very prominent literary figure in India, who has also produced fine literary pieces linking the Diaspora and India.

As has been indicated by Sujata Bhatt in *Chutney* (1995), women, most importantly Diasporic women are considered as the carriers of culture and they are expected to reproduce their culture by replicating the perfect mango chutney. The domestic arena has been restricted to the kitchens and household, where women are expected to replicate their own culture in the Diaspora. In

some of my findings, this concern had reached at a debatable level, a general point of view which indicates women as the carriers of culture.

Recreating authentic food in the Diaspora, makes the immigrant feels nostalgic. Stewart (1992, 252) has defined “nostalgia” as “a cultural practice, not a given context; its forms, meanings and effects shift with the context- it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present”. According to Mannur (2002, 31), “for a high class immigrant located in the USA, such as cookbook author, Madhur Jaffrey, cooking is one such cultural practice, resignified, reinterpreted and even distorted within the diasporic imaginary”. As Sucheta Mazumdar (1991) also states, the inclusion of various Indian ingredients like chilli, pepper, cashews and the like has demarcated the dish as authentically Indian. Some specific foodways that are practiced to prepare Indian food items are categorized as essentially Indian only to infuse the nostalgic feeling to consider it as ‘Indian’.

This topic of nostalgia is deeply rooted with foodways and culinary traditions that has found space in the novels. In *Monsoon Diary*, Shobha Narayan speaks about her childhood memories where she becomes nostalgic about her childhood days. She goes on to illustrate her childhood when she used to visit her grandmother. The second chapter is more of a reminiscence of her childhood memories at her maternal grandparents’ place at Coimbatore with some daily encounters of food served in the household.

“A light meal of rice, rasam and a couple of vegetable curries.” (Narayan, 2003, 17)

Narayan’s childhood memories are decorated with her images from her mother’s kitchen, where she was first introduced with the various spices used in the kitchen; and their daily uses in human life.

“Cumin and cardamom are arousing, so eat them only after you get married, she said. Fenugreek tea makes your hair lustrous and increases breast milk, so drink copious amounts when you have babies. Coriander seeds balance and cool fiery summer vegetables. Mustard and sesame seeds heat the body during winter. Asafetida suppresses, cinnamon nourishes and lentils build muscles.” (Narayan, 2003, 49-50).

Though appreciative of her heritage, Narayan wanted to study in the USA, which her parents reluctantly allowed her only after she passed the test of preparing a delicious meal and serving it to her family.

“A smell can carry a memory, and certain foods can compress the memory of an entire childhood into them.” (Narayan, 2003, 51)

Food enlivens the sense of belonging and the attachment that they feel towards their homeland. The Diaspora leaves their homeland; but the traditions remain etched within them. Curry leaves, forms an essential ingredient of South Indian cuisine, and since the author hails from the southern part of India, she is reminded of this particular ingredient as she mentions,

The confusion increased more on the breakfast table, once she reached America. The flavours and colors varied as the breakfast table constituted with people pouring in from all parts of the world.

“I told my breakfast mates that I wasn’t used to eating sweet food- jams, jellies and syrup- so early in the morning. When I added that a main component of my morning meal was a spice dosa with chilli powder, they looked shocked. A Japanese student added that she ate rice and salty miso for breakfast, it was my first lesson in Globalism.” (Narayan, 2003,112)

As Suleri (1991, 22) speaks about nostalgia, she states, culinary memories turn immigrants to be “adamant, entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland”. In *Fasting Feasting*, Anita Desai has also elaborated on the feelings of being nostalgic for an immigrant. This feeling has been repeatedly felt in this novel when Arun, the protagonist and the son of the family leaves India for the USA. He writes frequent letters back home.

In this novel, Desai has drawn the difference in the culinary traditions in an Indian family and an American family.

The word ‘Nostalgia’ is derived from two Greek words, *nostos* which means “return home” and *algia* which means “longing”.³⁴ It denotes a strong feeling of longing for home in the past, present and future. The Diaspora always feels like being in ‘exile’, which according to Jasbir Jain (1998, 12), “indicates a compulsory isolation and a nostalgic anchoring in the past”. The longing for home and homeland is a consistent factor noticed among the immigrants. As Linda Hutcheon (1998, 19) in her book specifies:

“Nostalgia, in fact, may depend, precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia’s power- for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past, as actually experienced, of course, it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present.”

The novel *Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni portrays the “geographical, social and cultural struggle undergone by the population”. Tilo, the protagonist of the novel and the

³⁴ <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>

mistress of spices, tries to reconnect the Indians with their homelands through her store of spices. The spices act as a stimulant to make them nostalgic about their past. Tilo, the protagonist is bound by certain rules and regulations, one among them is the inability to touch the customers, who come to her spice store. The myriad characters in Divakaruni's novel, irrespective of their gender and age, has questioned themselves about their identity in the new land, where they have migrated and have framed a new identity on their own. Jagjit, a 10 year old Indian boy, who comes to Tilo's store with his mother suffers from such a crisis.

“Jagjit, with his thin, frightened wrists who has trouble in school because he knows only Punjabi still. Jagjit, whom the teacher has put in the last row next to the drooling boy with milk blue eyes.” (Divakaruni, 1997, 38)

Jagjit, who is admonished and often, disgraced at school and sometimes at home, is nostalgic about his homeland to flee from the harsh realities.

“At night, he lies with his eyes open, staring until the stars begin to flicker like fireflies in his grandmother's *khetki*³⁵ outside Jullunder. She is singing as she gathers for dinner bunches of *saag*³⁶ green as his turban. Punjabi words that sound like rain.” (Divakaruni, 1997, 39)

The characters in the novel, primarily Indians, are frequent visitors at Tilo's store. They come back to the remedies of their homeland, which were easily available in the spice store. This is prominent in the novel, when Tilo, says,

“...fenugreek I asked your help when Ratna came to me burning from the poison in her womb.... And when Ramaswamy turned from his wife of twenty years to a newer

³⁵ farm

³⁶ Leafy vegetable

pleasure... Binita with a lump like a nugget of lead in her breast and the doctors saying cut, and the look in her husband's eyes as he paced the store saying, "What shall I do, please?" " (Divakaruni, 1997, 47)

Haroun, a taxi driver, from Kashmir, had also adhered to Tilo and her remedies, whenever he needed them. He had been encountering varied experiences once he came to America. He recollects his memories from his home, when,

"One day the fighting started, and tourists stopped coming. Rebels rode down from the mountain passes with machine guns and eyes like black holes in their faces, yes, into the streets of Srinagar, the name which is meaning auspicious city. I am telling father Abbajan we must leave now, but grandfather said, "*Toba Toba*, where will we go, this is the land of our ancestors." (Divakaruni, 1997, 27)

The memories of their homeland are finely etched in their memories. Some have acted as a relaxing factor for the immigrant, while others have brought pain for the loss of their homelands. While Haroun was reminiscing about his homeland, Tilo tries to bring solace to his pains by rubbing *chandan*³⁷ and relieving him from the trauma of the past. Divakaruni, through the plot and the characters in the novel has tried to pave a way for the immigrants, through nostalgia, by creating fresh memories in the new homeland for the future, with a strong sense of longing for the past.

The novel, *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* approaches at the life of a second generation migrant, Sunya. Sunya was born in Seattle a year after her parents emigrated from India. India exists only in the virtual media for her and she has no trace of being an Indian by

³⁷ sandalwood

ethnicity. She always had the question in her mind of her being Indian or not as she had never travelled to India and had never experienced the taste of Indianness, apart from her mother, who speaks in her native language, Bengali. Similar to many second-generation migrants, Sunya faced a likely situation of bearing a dual identity of being born of Indian parents and bred in America. With the departure of her father at her infancy, the other part of Indianness has been cast away from her. The novel is not set in India, unlike her other novels. It is set in Seattle and Japan and has different sensibilities. As a second generation migrant, Sunya never felt the urge to go back home, as her home was in Seattle. Her mother, always had the Indian-ness strongly etched in her mind as she was one of the women who had come to the USA after her marriage. A mere reference to India is elaborated in this novel, where India has been addressed as “a land where politicians have been found to lie and steal and sadhus turn out to be fake, movies deliver a comforting escape from the everyday routine... It could be due to the genes that Mother has passed on to me, but in my mind, film folks wield magical power. But all magic, I remind myself, is temporary.” (Kirchner, 2003, 45). Sunya also points out how she came to know that “... in India only the illiterate worked as cooks’. Though she belongs to the second generation class of migrants, she is acquainted with Indian food and its culinary traditions by her mother and her friends, who “owned restaurants in the city, the kind with tablecloths, candlelight, batik work, two- for one coupons, and stereotypical names like India Pavilion, The Taj, or most popularly Bengal Tiger.” (Kirchner, 2003, 68)

Though Indian food has never made her nostalgic in the course of the novel, she was made to realize of being an Indian by her mother, “As they sat down to a dinner of flat bread, mango pickles and a vegetable *ghonto*.”³⁸ (Kirchner, 2003, 212). The mention of her childhood days

³⁸ A mixture of all vegetables

where the mother-daughter duo struggled and lived inside “a confining little cubbyhole where the air was thick with the scent of cinnamon from Vietnam, nutmeg from the West Indies, and saffron from India, what we called our “kitchen kingdom.” (Kirchner, 2003, 51) Sunya mentions that her interest in baking is inspired from her mother’s art and craftsmanship of baking and cooking. “Years ago she taught me how to analyze the components of a dish with small initial tastes before the mouth becomes overwhelmed.” (Kirchner, 2003, 58).

“The myriad references of Deepika, Sunya’s mother reminiscing her days in her homeland, in Calcutta, has numerous references in the novel. She, often, used to sit back and recollect about her maiden days and early marriage days”. (Kirchner, 2003, 146).

The desire to recreate memories of the homeland are widely noticed among the migrants. According to Mannur (2007, 13), “memories of the past are always reflected in and refracted through the shards of a mirror which nostalgically restructures how memories are seen.” The novels that I have discussed in the context of nostalgia extensively portray how the immigrants feel nostalgic about their homeland and how their authentic cuisine aids them in reminiscing the memories of homeland. While we study migrant literature the novels portray a comprehensive study of ethnic identity, traditional cuisine and memories of the homeland. Whether it is Shobha or Tilo or Sunya or Arun, (the protagonists of the novels discussed), food has always constructed their strong linkage with their homelands.

3.7. Cultural Identity and Cuisine in the Diaspora

Identity is associated with “the categorization about race, ethnicity and gender”. (Smith, 1983). The issue of identity forms the main bedrock of our study. To define cultural identity, I would like to refer to Stuart Hall (1996), when he argues that cultural identity is formed and not

inherited, but can also evolve in migration. Hall in his essay, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996), rightly states that there are two ways to comprehend cultural identity. The first position clearly defines cultural identity in terms of a sort of “true self” hidden inside the others, more artificially imposed on the selves which people of the same history or ancestry hold in common. The other position defines cultural identity in terms of change which is applicable to certain historical contexts. He asserts, “Cultural identity...is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’”. Cultural identity is a state of being which already exists but again a production which is never complete always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation”. Hall’s idea of cultural identity goes well with defining the identity of the immigrants. Hence, it has been observed that the literary representations of the Diaspora are much more open-minded, adaptable and transnational than their previous stage of being.

The stages of identities tend to change by various factors working under specific conditions. We are talking about the immigrants who are constantly facing the negotiations posed by the changing conditions around them when they cross the political and geographical boundaries. This marks an inevitable change in their identities both by native and foreign influences. Benzi Zhang (2000) argues that when a migrant moves from one place to the other, they have to re-construct their own identities with respect to the new situations around them. He also states that many immigrant writers have been constantly facing negotiating identities and handling unfamiliar situations in their lives. David Henry Hwang (1994, x) states, with respect to the changing identity of the Diaspora,

“I do not believe that I will become a fully actualized Asian American. Indeed such a state would be death, creatively and politically. The only constant in our

lives is changing, and as we approach the new challenges of the 1990s we must reevaluate and question old assumptions to progressively harness such change.”

As has been stated by Hwang (1994), immigrant writers have faced the same kind of complex identities in their lives and have also tried to portray them in their literary works. Most of the literary devices are such that helps to frame the identities represented by the characters. The immigrant writers try to define the identities in various ways- be it either with describing the pride in flaunting the ethnicity in the characters or the weakening of the pure ethnicity by performing interracial marriages which reveal their identities. This proves that they are transnational figures trying to identify themselves and re-creating their identities and sensibilities.

The Diasporic identity carries with itself a problem as it carries a dual sense. Firstly it tries to continue to look back with nostalgia, creating alienation yet trying to construct a new identity in a new land all leading to a displaced identity and a hyphenated and fractured existence.

Indian writers have vividly adopted the skills of self expression through writing novels- a distinct literary form to have emerged in the twentieth century. The novels clearly show the loss of identity as one of the pertinent existential problem that the Diaspora faces. The loss of identity grounds the root cause of all the problems faced by the Diaspora. As has been stated by Samuel Butler in *Erewhon* (1871, 26-31), where Higgs adds that the plight of a person with a lost identity.

“It is dreadful feeling that of being cut off from one’s own kind... one beings doubting one’s own identity...Each movement I felt increasing upon me the dreadful doubts as to

my own identity- as to the continuity of my past and present existence- which is the first sign of that distraction which comes to those who have lost themselves in the bush.”

As has been stated by Dennis Wrong (1968) that “identity and ‘identity crisis’ have become the semantic beacons of our time. Identity has become a value charged, almost in charismatic terms, with its secure achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation”. Ania Loomba (1988, 180) has also stated that “the migration of peoples is perhaps the definitive characteristic of the twentieth century and in crucial ways of diasporic identities have come to represent much of the experience of post-coloniality”.

Food, in the migrant space, becomes an enlivening factor for carving one’s cultural identity. It defines the place of ethnic origin of the migrants, and this is how, the migrant distinguishes themselves from the others. The practice of cooking authentic dishes and maintaining the culinary traditions is an act to preserve the authenticity of the migrant families. Though it differs in case of the second generation migrants, the first generation migrants love to showcase their culinary expertise in the Diaspora and define their belonging in the diasporic space. As Suleri (1989, 22) said, “Expatriates are adamant, entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland”.

The novels that are analysed in this chapter also needs to be discussed pointing out the concept of cultural identity and how it has been vividly portrayed in terms of food in the novel. “Cultures and societies add importance to food, thereby defining the identity of a race, or an individual. The food patterns and culinary traditions are shaped according to the prevailing customs and traditions of the society”. (Civitello, 2011, viii) “The role of food and culinary traditions mark

itself as an identity marker and it can be subtle or obvious in everyday lives. Their regular culinary traditions depend on what and how they eat and live”. (Grew, 2000).

The authors of the respective novels, have framed their identity in the new host land and the protagonists have shown to bear a deep sense of attachment with the culinary traditions. Shobha Narayan, in her book, *Monsoon Diary*, has brilliantly pointed out the diversity in Indian cuisine, which varies from state to state.

“Marwaris are from the colourful desert state of Rajasthan, and Marwari women are fantastic cooks. They are also known to be generous, which makes them dream companions for a long train journey. Enterprising Gujratis, on the other hand, were more businesslike, which meant that I had to ingratiate myself by performing small favors in order to gain access to their divine *kadi*(sweet and sour butter milk soup).a boisterous Punjabi family was always good for card games interspersed with *Rajma*(spiced kidney beans). Intellectual Bengalis from Calcutta were a challenge. I had to match wits with them before they would share their luscious *rosogollas*³⁹ and sweet *sandesh*⁴⁰ with me. I didn’t bother with the South Indians, being one myself.” (Narayan, 2003, 61)

After she migrated to the United States for higher studies, she wanted to be steady in her cooking skills. Her idea of globalism again came to her mind, with Doug’s idea of the concept of ‘world cuisine’. With immigrants pouring in America, this was a new and contemporary issue to be dealt with. Therefore, the benefit dinner was more of an integration of cuisines from different cultures of the respective countries. With the mix and match of Indian cuisine with cuisine from different cultures, we also come across the first instances of globalization.

³⁹ A sweet dish from West Bengal, India

⁴⁰ A dessert originating from the Bengal region in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent created with milk and sugar.

Narayan's house was filled up with the smells of Indian spices. Her New York kitchen is a typical modern day kitchen in a New York apartment. It is a compilation of a variety of modern accessories and conveniences, but the Indian spices reminds her of her Indian roots.⁴¹

As said by Manreet Dhaliwal (2018) (Vol.5, Issue 1, Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature), almost all South Asian Diasporic writers have mentioned food as one of the key ingredient that defines their identity. Food is an essential ingredient to define a culture's ethnic identity "reflecting on the person's identity". Gardaphe and Xu (2007, 5) has stated that "Ethnic identity formations have been shaped by experiences of food, productions and services, culinary creativities, appetites, desires, hunger and even vomit".

The concept of identity is a debatable topic in the lives of the immigrants, who are known to be suffering an acute identity crisis, after their migration into a new land from their homeland. Tilo, the protagonist of *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, is a fine example of such an immigrant. The narrative by Divakaruni, is based on the Indian identity, trying to survive in a new land of America. Tilo, (Tilottama), is a character who often questions her identity either as Tilo, the mistress of spices, who connects the Indians coming to her shop with their homelands; or the young woman who cries out to be loved and cared for. The Indian shop of Tilo, which smells of the exotic Indian spices, has a strong voice throughout the novel.

Food forms a metaphorical symbol throughout the narrative. Each chapter in the novel is dedicated to a spice and Tilo is shown to be performing her rites of soothing other's problems throughout the novel through these spices.

⁴¹ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1244700>

“The spices speak to me,... it’s voice is like evening, like a beginning of the world.” (Divakaruni, 1997, 13)

The novel by Divakaruni “punctures its own narrative about magically curative spices by suggesting that ingesting spices without praxis of collective action is not a viable palliative against racism”. (Mannur 2010,109). The identity of an Indian American subject is prevalent in the novel, which gets framed only when the Indians come to Tilo, the mistress of spices for healing their pains and sufferings. The overpowering aroma of spices in the spice store has helped Tilo to shape an identity of her own.

As an Asian American, Padma Lakshmi states with reference to forming an identity in the Diaspora⁴²,

“...we are all a little bit Chinese, a little bit Mexican, a little bit Italian and French... most of us do not eat a single cuisine all the time... one day sushi, another Thai, a third Italian, and the fourth day...maybe Mexican, or how about Moroccan?... I want to eat a dish to remind me of mysterious Marrakech, and a fiery curried broth to evoke my lost childhood in the deep lushness of the South Indian rainforest. Like most of us, I have been influenced by the mate, an Italian lover and a Swiss aunt have all affected my cooking and I am grateful to them for making my life in the kitchen more robust and complicated”.

Divakaruni’s novels have made women as the central characters. With reference to the gender and their quest for an identity in the Diaspora, I would like to quote K.S Dhanam 2008, 17, where he states:

⁴² <https://www.today.com/food/hot-kitchen-padmas-chili-honey-butter-1D80356661>

Divakaruni's books are directed mainly to women of all races and faiths who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their cultures and religion... she also contrasts the lives and perceptions of the first generation immigrants with of their children born and raised in foreign land. And inevitably, it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities. She has her finger accurately on the diasporic pulse, fusing eastern values with western ethos. Her writing course with her identification is with a brave new world forging to life. Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today's issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond anthropology, beyond sociology and beyond academia.

As rightly said by Joel Kuortti (2007, 3), being a part of the Diaspora has dual sides of it. "It can be a positive side for the affirmation of an identity, or, conversely, a negative site of fears of losing that identity." As it has been stated earlier, the female character, Uma, experiences patriarchal oppression in her family in India and the second part of the novel, features the migration of Arun (the family's son) to America to pursue higher studies. Uma, who has been subjected to the patriarchal norms in the typical Indian Hindu household felt liberated at attending the convent school.

"There were those wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be[...]
She prickled with impatience for the fifteenth of July when school would reopen and a new term would begin." (Desai, 1999, 21)

This novel by Desai has formulated a shape to her personal experiences as a part of the Diaspora after she moved to the USA to teach and write, leaving her Indian consciousness behind, by

creating the character of Arun, the protagonist in the novel. The protagonist Arun has been renamed after he moves to America. He is 'Arun' in India and 'Ahroon' in America, where he bears a conflict in his identity. The environment around him changes after migration, and so does his food habits. When Mrs. Patton and Arun go out for shopping, unlike his father, Mrs. Patton seemed busy to fill up her cart with foods worried more about the food value and calorific content. Arun's identity as an Indian is sharply contrasted, when Mrs. Patton prepares *dal*⁴³ for his dinner, as he would not adhere to non-vegetarian meals. "...when he has poured out the lentils into the dish to eat--- khaki-coloured, lumpy, at the same time thick and runny." (Desai, 1999, 183) This runny soup of lentils creates a sharp contrast in identity for Ahroon in America, while the other members in the Patton family despises it. Arun's food habits face changes but within his heart, he is still an Indian, with a sense of nostalgia and belongingness to the past.

As has been pointed out by Mannur (2010, 185), "For many other immigrant communities, food becomes a tool to articulate tensions that emerge through the chaffing of identity vectors of "home and "diaspora" ". While Tilo, the mistress of spices and Arun, the immigrant in Desai's novel tries to shape out an identity in the adopted land, Sunya, the protagonist in Bharti Kirchner's novel, *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* tries to reform her identity by struggling her way to own a bakery of her own. The novel opens up into the world of Sunya Malhotra, a second generation Indian American who was raised in Seattle by a single mother. Unlike the other novels, this novel does not peek into the Indian scenes or any reminisces of Sunya in India. Her constant efforts to own a bakery and create an identity of her own is admonished by the bakery in her lane named, Cakes Plus. The Indian within herself, is often ignited when she visits her mother, who had taught her the basics of baking and cooking.

⁴³ pulses

“Years ago she taught me how to analyze the components of a dish with small initial tastes before the mouth becomes overwhelmed”. (Kirchner, 2003, 58)

Sunya’s identity was often challenged as a second generation American Indian. Her looks often defined her Indian descent, while she denied of being an Indian and accepted herself as American. Among many of the occasions, she was questioned of her identity,

“Where are you from, mademoiselle, if I may ask?

Seattle. I was born and raised there”. (Kirchner, 2003,112)

“Ah, the crown jewel of the Pacific Rim, famous for coffee, apples, flannel, software and drizzly weather... I’d have slightly thought you’re from South Asia. You have an aura about you that is distinctly Asian.” (Kirchner, 2003,112)

“I’m an American. My parents were born in India, but I’ve never been there”.

(Kirchner, 2003,112)

Sunya faces all difficulties that come along her way, but she manages to succeed and find her own way. Another instance of Sunya’s life makes her crave for an identity. Her father had abandoned them at her infancy. The unceasing quest of finding out her father also creates a sharp contrast with the other craving to create an identity as a baker in the novel. Thus, the novel by Kirchner vividly portrays the life of a “woman of colour” who aims for her cherished bakery business alive. Though the novel is replete with sweet and enticing imageries of pastries being baked, it also thrives to show the failures that Sunya goes through in establishing her dream and how she rejoices at the completion of the same.

3.8. Food and Gender in the Diaspora

The history of migration has been strongly associated with the male migration, whereas the actors of “cultural harbingers and homeland culture” are the females in the society. While extensive studies have been made on the feminist approach of diasporic studies, food and women share an interminable linkage, that has been discussed and argued in the later chapters. In this section of the chapter, I would like to analyze the gendered aspects of migration and food by analyzing the above mentioned novels.

Women have been set in their positions in maintaining the domestic sphere of the household. As Partha Chatterjee (2010, 126) has rightly pointed out, “in the entire phase of the nationalist struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture. Its spiritual essence... The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture and women must take the responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external condition of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (i.e; feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized”. With reference to women and food, Madhur Jaffrey was one of the pioneers in changing the perception of women and food. The Indian cookbooks were not just typical cookbooks which offered recipes of Indian food. They were autobiographical narratives, which furnished “appropriate contexts for South Asian food practices, medico-moral discourses and commensuality.” (Roy 2002, 478).

Similar to the plight of women in homeland, the diaspora also assigns the role of home making to the women, “who, thus, defined, begins to enact them using multiple strategies of food, dress and forms of labour.” (Rao Mehta 2015, 6)

The female authors of the aforementioned novels, have also struggled to reshape an identity of their own after migration and this has been well reflected in their novels. As we take a sneak peek into their discussed novels, we notice the gendered subjectivities in the characters of Shobha in *Monsoon Diary* by Shobha Narayan, Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, Arun's sisters in *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai and Sunya in *Pastries: A novel of Desserts and Discoveries* by Bharti Kirchner. The authors, who are immigrants and have moved to the USA, have solely tried to solicit the aspects of being a part of the Diaspora, of which food has formed an interminable part to represent their culture and being. Food has formed an overwhelming portion of their narratives, where food and women have formed their path simultaneously. Each of the novels has portrayed women being the protagonists and chefs, trying to master their own identities. The gastronomic cultures have formed the aisle for the characters to adhere to their homelands; the land from where they belong and the sites for being nostalgic.

In the later part of the discussion in this chapter, a reading of the novels by the authors would be presented and it will be shown how food plays an important role in 'maintaining gender stereotypes'.

The novel *Feasting, Fasting* by Anita Desai, here tries to depict the life of an Indian household tied within the ideologies of the patriarchal system. The novel deals with two parts- the first part deals with the Indian family of Arun, which comprises of Uma, Aruna and Arun, while the later part of the novel deals with the moving away of Arun to the USA. After migration, Arun spends his summer break with the Patton family. The instance of multiculturalism is depicted when Arun moves to the United States for higher studies and his bewildering experience at the Patton's house in America. It is more vividly shown when Mrs. Patton shares vegetarian food with Arun

at her home and Arun gifts her an Indian shawl. It has been a practice that women would be the sole workers in the kitchen and in the household, whereas men are considered to be the “end-users of the products of cooking, consume services rendered by women”.(2011, 83). In the first part of the novel by Desai, though mama and papa are considered a single entity, it is the father who advises on the family matters, while mama has a supporting role, catering only to the daily needs of her husband and her children. As we look into the characters of *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai, the sisters of Arun were pressed under the patriarchal construct of the Indian society. As Urvashi Bhutalia (2004, 101), in her essay, *Gender and nation: Some Reflections from India*, rightly states,

“... women are generally left out of the process of nation making and their relationship to such a process or indeed to the nation itself, is a nebulous one..., although it is by now clear that much more than being simply a male construct, the nation is gendered construct and, though it may involve men and women (the latter in what may be seen as ‘lesser’ ways) it is a very patriarchal construct”.

At another instance, we also observe that food items have been divided into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.

“In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not an orthodox home that our mother and aunts did not slip us something on the sly”. (Desai, 1999, 6)

The childhood memories of mama always had food as its main concern. It has been a strange tradition in Indian households that women who were responsible for the nourishment and provisioning of the family were ignored when it was their turn to think about their nutritional

requirements. While mama thought herself an equal to her husband, she withdrew her elder daughter Uma from her school as she thought it would be appropriate for Uma to learn the household chores and help her in the same. Uma is told to “cook fritters will not be enough. Papa wants sweets’ with his evening tea”. The opening chapter also reveals the status of the women in the household, when Uma is busy in packing sweets for her brother, Arun.

Various instances in the novel by Desai has illustrated on the different food habits that are restricted for men and women. “The myth that certain foods and dishes were ‘masculine’, and one needed to devour those for strength was traceable to the intersection of colonialism, white supremacy, domesticity and masculinity.”⁴⁴ In the context of Desai and her characters, the female members in the family are supposed to cook, feed the children and the men in the family and eat the left overs. The nuts and the proteins are always provided to the men of the family because they require strength to work, whereas women are always expected to cook, fast and display their love and sincerity towards the family. This is also well observed in Desai’s novels, where Arun’s sisters are not paid importance whereas Arun being the son of the family is well loved and appreciated.

Instances of vegetarian diet are also widely observed in the novel. Uma’s fondness for Mira Masi a family acquaintance, churns up with the image of Mira Masi, making round, perfect *laddoos*⁴⁵. The fondness for Mira Masi grew more with her visits to Uma’s place more often. Her abstinence from non-vegetarian meals also comes from widowhood. Widows, in India are expected to be deprived from all worldly pleasure, which also includes food; and only restore to religion. The second part of the novel looks into the isolated life led by Arun, away from home.

⁴⁴ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/taste-of-life-when-and-why-the-misal-was-pune-s-steak-served-very-rare-101629370245695.html>

⁴⁵ Indian sweets made of flour, which are yellow in colour and round in shape.

Arun's acquaintance, the Patton family takes to some sort of judgment against him, when he refuses to eat meat. Unlike his home in India, food did not play a significant role in the Patton family. Mr. Patton cooked several times, often unaware of the family's emotional needs. Mrs. Patton, whose emotional disposition and affection towards Arun made her a mother-like figure to Arun. Mrs. Patton's continuous need to please her husband often reminded Arun of her mother in India. She goes out shopping provisions for Arun, feeling delighted and eager to taste Indian vegetarian dishes.

Therefore, in this novel, Desai has illustrated the roles of women among the middle class Indian and American households at two different sections of the novel. The novel also projects the thought about how women are playing their roles in nurturing and nourishing the family and its responsibilities.

Shobha Narayan has also tried to recreate the culinary magic and the identity of the immigrant in the Diaspora in her book *Monsoon Diary*. The autobiographical novel opens with an introduction of first food, rice and *ghee* that she ate when she was six months old. The author makes innumerable references to women being the rulers in the kitchen.

“Indian mothers are obsessed with feeding their children.” (Narayan, 2003, 3)

The patriarchal Indian families have pre-defined roles of women being the care takers of the house and men being the earners in the family. Similar to Anita Desai, Shobha Narayan has also defined the gender position in terms of culture and food. Among many of the famous food memoirs, *Monsoon Diary* has come forward as one of the novels which points out the gender roles in the Indian kitchen and how it has helped in shaping the identity for women. From her

early childhood, Narayan's mother and grandmother have played pivotal roles in her life in nurturing her food habits.

“My mother smiled approvingly, as if I had understood some fundamental cooking concept... You sprinkle it on gas-producing food like beans and lentils so that they won't give you gas. Unless you use onions, which serves the same purpose”. (Narayan, 2003, 49)

At another instance, it has been aptly mentioned that when Narayan accompanies her mother for shopping groceries. “My favourite was the Ambika Appalam Depot, a compact shop filled with hundreds of spice powders, ready-made snacks, hot vegetable puffs, and of course, *appalams*, fried lentil wafers that are perfect accompaniments for rice-based South Indian cuisine”. (Narayan, 2003, 54-55).

The gendered instances has been well depicted in many other crucial points of the novel. As a young girl, Narayan was against the idea that a bride must be proficient in the kitchen. Though she disagrees with the concept of a bride being capable in her culinary skills in the kitchen, she complies with the standard norms and values that are practiced in the patriarchal households. At another point in the novel, she also conforms to these values and gets ready to accept the challenge to cook a vegetarian feast for the family to study in America. This occasion of challenge only comes up with the idea of cooking being the sole arena of women and after migration, the migrant woman would carry along with them the Indian traditions and values.

In many other occasions, it has been observed that Narayan, after moving to America, has tried to re create some of the traditional dishes made by her mother and grandmother, but the “modern gadgets that litter my kitchen these days” (Narayan, 2003, 46) has not been triumphant in

reproducing the same taste and texture of the food that was prepared at home. The failure to recreate and find the authentic South Indian food in America has been mentioned in many of the events.

“I have never eaten a good *idli*⁴⁶ in America, although countless Indian restaurants offer them. American *idlis* are hard and lack a tangy sour dough taste. For good *idlis* you have to come to my hometown” (Narayan, 2003, 72-73).

Cooking has been a major activity for Narayan after she migrated from the country, to find the lost tastes and values of her homeland. She becomes a cook, now, to relish her lost dishes and nurture her taste buds. Later, as her marriage gets fixed, she is also tested for her culinary skills and how she has been symbolized as the epitome of “familial culture and gendered values”.

“I had always cooked to gain something: permission to go to America, a chance to stay an extra year, for money...” (Narayan 2003)

After getting married, Narayan faced challenges while cooking for her husband. Similar to a typical Indian household, when the husband goes out for work and the wife remains at home cooking sumptuous meals for her husband; Narayan lived the life of a docile Indian wife. The everyday challenges of preparing the perfect *rasam* or the perfect *idli* made her prove herself to be carrying the cultural and familial values with her to the hostland after migration.

“I took the challenge with the fervor of a graduate student. I missed the goals and achievements that marked student life and transferred all my energies into cooking. Cooking well became my goal, and when I succeeded, it was an achievement. At least for me.” (Narayan, 2003, 194)

⁴⁶ A type of rice cake popular as breakfast food in South India.

In this food memoir, Narayan has aptly produced some of the gendered subjectivities that are well maintained in the kitchens. Similar to many of the circumstances, cooking and carrying of traditions has been marked as the sincere duty of the female in this narrative, too. Narayan, after negating many of the age old ideas had to succumb to it and enjoyed it.

While Narayan and Desai has tried to explore the ponderous issues of gender and identity in their novels, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni is also not left out of the race. As an immigrant herself, she has experienced the traumatic issues of being an immigrant. Her novels have portrayed women immigrants and their associated issues with paramount importance. Simultaneously, the gastronomic culture and traditions has also found essential space in her narratives. Among many of her novels, *The Mistress of Spices* has found monumental popularity and has also been adapted into a cinematic production. The protagonist, Tilo, shares her diasporic experience in the novel. She has been running the spice store by herself in an estranged land, away from her homeland. Tilo, was the chosen one, among all the other girls who were trained by the First Mother, known as the Old One to be transported to America, from India. According to Mannur (2007, 17), “[w]omen are frequently (but problematically) associated with positions within the domestic cultural economy and charged with maintaining the edifice of home life,” and further works towards the “faithful reproduction of Indianness” in the Diaspora.

As expected of an Indian woman carrying their traditions and cultures overseas, as they migrate, “Tilo was also trained by the Old one which was based on the traditional hindu *gurukul*⁴⁷, where the teachers and the students are predominantly male. Contrary to the popular structure of the *gurukul*, the students and the teacher here, were women. The Old One used to send the mistress’

⁴⁷ It is a Vedic school, where pupils live with their teachers.

across the borders to other countries to help and rescue the innumerable South Asians who were scattered all over the globe”.

The various women characters in her novels are docile, traditional, yet rebellious trying to create an identity for themselves. Amongst many other characters in the novel, Lalita is one such character who poses as a fine example of a docile Indian woman married to an elderly man settled in America. Lalita’s character presents the everyday lives of Indian women in America, whose lives remain unchanged after migrating to America.

Like the other novels about food, *The Mistress of Spices* is affluent with food images and how it has been a form of cultural representation for the Diaspora. As Meenakshi Mukherjee in Mannur (2000, 201) rightly suggests, “in this tale of a mysterious eastern woman the distinctly ‘Indian’ flavor of the title is intensified by naming the sections ‘Turmeric’, ‘Red Chilli’, ‘Peppercorn’, ‘Lotus Root’ and ending for good measure, with a climatic chapter called ‘Maya’ in case the seasonings have not been sufficiently cooked. For those in India, spices are taken-for-granted ingredients of a daily cooking and do not carry any cultural connotation. They assume a symbolic value only when dislodged from their normal context”.

Similar to many other food novels, this novel by Divakaruni is replete with images of exotic Indian spices used to heal the South Asian immigrants. The spices in the novel, are not specified as commodities, but as “magical palliatives that counter the effects of racism and social inequality.” (Mannur 2000, 97). Similar to situations in kitchens in the homeland, the situation does not differ in the Diaspora. In this novel by Divakaruni, Tilo, is the representation of the sect of women who are saddled with the responsibilities of carrying their culture and traditions outside their own country. She has been given the responsibility by the Old One to heal the

wounds and injuries of the South Asians settled in America. Instead of remaining committed to healing the people of her community, she opts out of the system by using her own magical powers. Tilo falls for a native American, Raven and this union between a South Asian and a white American are used as tools to project multiculturalism, which is a common feature in the Diaspora. Though Tilo was not allowed to be partner with someone, she defied the rules and this becomes an act of “disavowal against a gendered system with castigates women for allowing their bodies to function more than repositories of tradition”. (Narayan, 2003, 101)

Thus the novel by Divakaruni sings the tale of a mistress of spice, which overtakes the stereotypical gendered categorization of immigrant females in the diaspora. It, on the other hand, illustrates, the relationship of Tilo with food and spices, which, gradually, extends “beyond a logic of national filial piety, to a space of women being independent and living a life which is deviant of a life that is assigned to them by the society”.

Though, the other narratives depict the struggles of the lives in the first generation Indian immigrant to America, Bharti Kirchner has come up with a narrative which solely defines the struggle for identity in the life of Sunya Malhotra in her novel, *Pastries: A novel of desserts and discoveries*. While Tilo, struggles to search for love; Sunya’s failure in love paves the way for her struggle to create an identity for herself. While Sunya’s mother, a first generation immigrant, is always reminiscent about her homeland, Sunya tries to discard her Indian roots and identifies herself as an American.

Food and women have been given an enticing ground in this novel, with the cover of the book, which bears an image of a woman’s face from the nose down gnawing at a chocolate pastry. The cover of the book itself, is a perfect example of a feminine narrative with an easy fusion of

sensuality and consumption. Unlike the other novels, Sunya does not cling to her Indian roots and does not seek to find her identity by recreating traditional dishes in her kitchen. She poses as an independent American woman, who strives to find out an American identity by learning and mastering the arts of baking to construct a new bakery in her neighbourhood. To win the race in the bakery war, Sunya travels to Japan to enroll herself in a baking school; where she is taught to “relinquish her ego while in the kitchen” and “to put aside emphasis on daily realities and to practice compassion”. (Kirchner, 2003, 301). At the end of her baking classes in Japan, Sunya realizes that it is the Asian philosophies of kitchen that transforms her to a full time baker, rather than a money minded businesswomen. She realizes,

“Cakes Plus is a competition, an obstacle in my path, only if I believe it to be so. Rather than anguish about how it may take business away from me, I’ll just concentrate on running my small bakery. I may have to cut down the hours of operation and the volume of baked goods I produce daily, but as long as I can, I’ll hold on to my shop. I am different from Cakes Plus, and in the difference resides my strength. Cakes Plus has actually given me an opportunity to awake”. (Kirchner, 2003, 309).

Contrary to Sunya, her mother is reminiscent about her homeland. As Sunya notices,

“The Indian in her worships movies. She tells me in India people consider movies- ‘fillim’ as they pronounce it- glorified Technicolor dreams, a means of uplifting themselves. In a land where politicians have been found to lie and steal and sadhus turn out to be fake, movies deliver a comforting escape from the everyday routine”. (Kirchner, 2003, 45)

Sunya’s mother, Deepika has played an unceasing role in her kitchens. The uncherished dream of owning a bakery is well prevalent in her words, when she recollects the traits of kitchen in her

homeland. “She never articulated what she really wanted, which might have had to do with her upbringing, which dictated a ‘girls must keep silent’ code of behavior.” (Kirchner, 2003, 52). The first instances of cooking has been taught and directed by her mother, when she explains, “Years ago she taught me how to analyze the components of a dish with small initial tastes before the mouth becomes overwhelmed”. The influence of her mother in the kitchen has been observed in a great extent all through the novel. Deepika, also addressed as Dee, in the novel, who migrated to America, after getting married to Prabhu Malhotra, feels nostalgic as she looks back to her old days in India. Dee was reminiscent of her childhood, when she was deprived of the benefits provided to her sisters.

“...Dee poured tea for everyone, the heavy teapot burdening her hand. There was only enough left to partially fill her own cup, though no one paid attention... Likewise, her two younger sisters were fed the ripest yellow mangoes, because they were ‘so young and tender’. All her life, she had to make do with hand-me-downs and leftovers, as if she were an afterthought...” (Kirchner, 2003, 147)

At other occasions, when Dee recollects her days in her motherland, she also “observed that her mother was watching with dismay the rapid disappearance of the *kachagollas*⁴⁸, as several hands reached out for the platter simultaneously. .. Dee could only tell that only the ingrained self-denial instilled in Indian women from childhood kept her mother from plucking one of the delicacies from the bowl while there was still time”. (Kirchner, 2003,148). As has been observed Indian women, who are considered docile and obedient, are also expected to eat less and also after the male in the household. They are not allowed to eat out of choice, rather they are forced to eat the left overs. Dee, who had faced the similar situation in her homeland, did not want to

⁴⁸ Light Indian sweet dish

practice the same after migrating, and was often found to recollect the disparities observed while feeding the family.

Though the novel by Kirchner captures a wide variety of images replete with food, it does not fail to project how women and food have formed a formidable part in the narrative. This reading of the culinary narratives does not just gives a spicy and sweet touch to the readers, but also brings to light the “viable aesthetic response to matters of everyday significance” and matters related to the Diaspora.

To conclude, one can further vividly point out that the writings of the women diasporic authors describe about the diversity and the multiculturalism of the migrant community, in respect to the culinary traditions and their literature used to represent the new society formed in the Diaspora. The myriad characteristics of the diaspora- the displacement, the nostalgia and the satisfaction of belonging that one craves for, while being a part of the Diaspora is well represented through their culinary traditions. Food, in the novels discussed above, has been used as a primary element to prove how food can be an instance for shaping one’s cultural identity and can be “a part and parcel of the process of enculturation”. The other facet of analysis in this chapter is also focused on the gender roles prevalent in the kitchens. With the times changing, the notions of food and women have changed, the novels have depicted that women and food share an unbroken relationship. While Sunya Malhotra strives to craft an identity by fulfilling her uncherished dream of becoming a baker, Mrs. Patton, Uma and Aruna, Shobha Narayan and Tilo share an indispensable relation with food. It is food that has given them the identity as an Indian in the migrant society. Food, here, has ultimately proved to be the entity that maintains an interpersonal relationship with the host land. Therefore, it is clearly mentioned that food is not just

used to satisfy one's physical hunger, but is also used to express ideas "within the man-made boundaries, from one community to another".

Food Bloggers in the United States: A Study of Indian Diaspora Women

“A food blog is a revised version of memoirs of recipes, histories and ethnicities that gets associated with food and for the Diaspora, food comes along with a strong sense of nostalgia and long borne memories of the homeland”. With the contemporary age of Internet coming into the scene and connecting our lives faster, it has become more convenient to pen down the thoughts and share it with the world within a few minutes. The history of food bears with them short stories of their origins and are told and re-told in cookbooks, food blogs and many other sources of narratives. In this chapter, I have chosen the form of blogging and how it has come about as a source of narrating the unsung stories of women and how they toil all day in the kitchen to prepare lavish dishes. Cooking was always considered a form of normal household chore and this act was always deeply connected with women and their daily activities. With the gradual erosion of time, cooking has evolved as a stylish form of art and the modern day blogs and other forms of narratives on cooking portray how the empowered Indian women of today in the Diaspora have cultivated this process into a more contemporary one. They try to narrate and preserve their ethnic recipes of the past; thereby re-fashioning their own stories and identities.

The space of blogs or the ‘blogosphere’ have become “a wide area for self-expression and identity formation for all the bloggers; especially the one that has crossed the geographical and

cultural borders”. There have been a huge number of scholarly studies being conducted on this arena of study. The term ‘blogosphere’ signifies “a wide domain which collectively signifies the bloggers and the world of blogs which is mainly constructed on the basis of self-expression”. The Oxford Dictionary defines blogosphere as “blogs considered collectively with their writers and readers as a distinct online network”. This term generally implies to a space of blogs and their writers who are free to express their feelings and sentiments.

Blogs are an accomplished source of self-expression and social exposure and interaction in the modern world where internet plays a dramatic role in connecting people across borders. Blogs also try to negotiate cultural identities by exposing people to some more exposures across the world.

According to Bourdieu (1984, 6), “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar”. Perhaps food also helps to distinguish between the delicious and the unappetizing. This research tries to provide a lens at how the women in the Diaspora tries to construct a digital identity in the Diaspora by re-creating the magic of the homeland in the kitchens and subsequently try to put forward their recipes brought from their homelands.

4.1. What is a blog?

“A blog is an online personal website that portrays the content which is organized as a personal diary or notebook”. The word ‘blog’ has been coined by Peter Merholz and the words Blogger, BlogSpot was later developed within Pyra Labs as a way to describe this new technology (Blood, 2002). Blogs are comprised mainly of text, images, videos and graphics. Each of the entry in the blog is dated and the viewers can view any post according to the date. The blogs are generally chronologically arranged so that the latest post is always at the top. “Blogs are generally personal journals presented digitally and it covers a wide area ranging from food, hobbies, pets, travel, political events, stories, art and craft and the like”. Though it is known that blogs are personal accounts of people written down digitally, it is often visible to many readers. Blogs are, fundamentally “used for interacting, communicating and connecting with people all over the world as well as for self-expression”.

Along with blogging, the Internet has developed innumerable tools for connecting with people across the world. The other tools of internet-based technologies availed by the common mass are Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook. Blogging is “one of the digital communicative technologies that have remained a popular choice for many”. Blogs are “not just interactive, communicative and means of self-expression; but also a source of updates, news and entertainment”. Blogging is considered the latest form of writing that facilitates connecting with the whole world. They are usually seen as “extensions of narratives which are written in print such as diaries, journals or autobiographies”. Smith and Watson (2010) explain how this form of blogging has been uplifted to literary status.

In the context of diary and narrative writing, it has been studied by researchers:

“Historians have long recognized the diary’s merit as a window onto the past and an exceptional source of information for the life and times of a diarist ... Sociologists mine diaries for material concerning social structures and relationships, anthropologists read them for their candid cultural insights, and literary scholars regard them as legitimate narrative forms worthy of study in their own right. Today’s on-line diaries hold potentially the same evidential value, provided that they are preserved and archived for the benefit of future researchers”. (O’Sullivan, 2005, 54)

According to Raman and Kasturi (2016), with the study of Blogs, scholars have divided blogs into two hemispheres – *Filter Blogs* and *Personal Blogs*. A Filter Blog is generally a public blog, which contains updates about Politics, Technology or Finance. These are mostly operated by men. Whereas, a personal blog is more of a lifestyle blog, where bloggers write about food, fashion, travel, photography or parenting/family. The personal blogs are primarily written by women, though there might be some exceptions in both the cases.

Raman and Kasturi (2016) also identifies how the bloggers are said to perform in two varied ways

1. “The bloggers maintain the art of blogging, i.e., writing and maintaining a blog. The whole process comes with writing about themselves or any such issues which they hold close to their hearts. This process tries to create a space where the bloggers create an identity on the internet for themselves.
2. The blogger performs the art of interaction with other bloggers on the same platform. They comment on each other’s post and this act of involvement creates a space for the bloggers to belong to the virtual world thereby creating an identity for themselves”.

The area of studying blogs has been limited to food blogs in this paper. Food blogs can be categorized “as a form of online diary or journal where the aromas of food and cooking are evoked through the interplay of text, video and images”. These food blogs speak of the presentation of delicacies presented in the kitchens and how it arouses the senses and offers a vivid glimpse of the kitchens in the homeland.

Blogging is considered an up-to-date form of writing that has been facilitated by the latest internet technologies. These are usually seen “as extensions of narratives, noted in print such as diaries, journals or autobiographies. A blog is structured with a title or banner which is placed generally at the top middle”. The sidebar contains mostly ‘About Me’ which depicts the profile of the bloggers. “The other components of the blog are the list of recent posts, archive and the blog posts or the design. Each post has space for the readers to comment and this is used to mark the popularity of the blog”.

4.2. Blogosphere

The space of blogs or the ‘blogosphere’ have become a wide area for self-expression and identity formation for all the bloggers; especially the one that has crossed the geographical and cultural borders. I have just tried to add some of my findings on the same through a survey work that I have performed.

“What is interesting about this space is that the discourses are produced by people who might occupy many different real spaces and their voices are tainted by the place they are writing from. Thus, a blog carries traces of a real space while it produces the virtual discursive space. Those who interact with blogs, either by reading them or writing them, thus occupy a cybernetic space that offers the opportunity to dwell in a virtual space that

is discursively produced while living in a real space very distant from the virtual space”.

(Mitra, 2008, 461)

The term ‘blogosphere’ was coined by Brad L. Graham on September 10, 1999. The word ‘blog’ has been coined by Peter Merholz, who used the phrase ‘we blog’ in the sidebar of his blog, named, www.peterme.com in April or May, 1999. By 2002, The Oxford English Dictionary had asked Peter Merholz for a print source for the word ‘blog’ so that it could be included in the dictionary.⁴⁹ The term ‘blogosphere’ signifies “a wide domain which collectively signifies the bloggers and the world of blogs which is mainly constructed on the basis of self-expression”. The Oxford Dictionary defines blogosphere as “blogs considered collectively with their writers and readers as a distinct online network”. This term generally implies an area of blogs and their writers who are free to express their feelings and sentiments. The year 2002 noticed the launching of the search engine Technorati.com and the number of blogs increased at a rapid rate, thereby creating a connection across the globe, sharing a vast amount of data, which were easily accessible. People around the world called this huge network of blogs as blogosphere (Rettberg, 2008). Rettberg (2008) asserts that, the other forms of social media are also considered other forms of blogging. For instance, Twitter is considered as ‘micro-blogging’. The terms ‘Blogger’ and ‘BlogSpot’ were later developed by Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan within Pyra Labs as a way to describe this new technology (Blood, 2002). The phenomenon called blogging came about in the 1990s and John Barger was one of the first to coin the term ‘weblog’ for his website in 1997 (Blood, 2004; McGrail, 2013). He used the word ‘weblog’ as a part of the title of his site, ‘Robert Wisdom: A Weblog by John Barger’ (Blood, 2000). The trend of blogging can be traced back to early autobiographical writing in the form of diaries, which has

⁴⁹ www.peterme.com, 14 June, 2002

now turned onto the diary style blogs of the present age (Serfaty, 2004). The Filter blogs bear more personal style but does not tend to narrate the daily happenings in the blogger's life. It concentrates more on sharing materials and ideas on which the blogger seems to show interest in. Personal blogs are more self-representational, whereas anonymous blogs are personal in nature, without sharing the blogger's identity (Rettberg, 2014).

4.3. Transnationalism Online

As we are discussing the space of blogs, I thought it important to write a few lines on the phenomenon of transnationalism. As has been stated in innumerable research articles and books, the Diaspora always has a nostalgic side to their existence which makes them long to return to their homeland. The Diaspora faces difficulty in linking with their past physically, thereby enabling another mode of attachment to their homelands. Therefore, it is suggested that a specific type of transnationalism exists online. With the migration of the people from the different stratas of society, it has also been studied that "migrants are often prone to migrate to cities of higher economic accumulation. History states that immigrants in the past were almost forced to sever all ties with their homelands, with subsequent generations emerging with a new identity, thereby erasing transnational connections. With the advancement of technology and communication tools, immigrants revived their relations with home".

The concept of 'transnationalism' was first used by Peter Kivisto (2001), Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc (1994, 1995) to portray the magnanimous phenomena of the contemporary migration through transnationalism. The term transnationalism was coined by writer Randolph Bourne (1916) in the early twentieth century to describe "a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures". In the current context, 'transnationalism' can be

defined as the “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of the nation state” (Vertovec 1999, 447; Pries 2007, 16). The meaning of ‘transnationalism’ has been defined on various grounds. The dispersed Diasporas of the old have become the present “transnational communities” which survive on a large scale of modes of social organizations. The Diaspora is characterized by two basic observations- “firstly they cannot discard the consciousness of their homeland and secondly the transnational aura is again an indispensable part of the Diaspora”. The Diaspora involves two different nations, i.e; the host nation and the motherland; who play an active role in maintaining connections. This specific process of networking across the geographical boundaries is most prominently termed as transnationalism. As Portes et.al (1999, 220a) argue, “... in other areas of human activity transnationalism involves individuals, their networks of social relations, their communities, and broader institutionalized structures such as local and national governments”.

One of the many grounds on which the above-mentioned phenomena can be described would be on the basis of identity. The identity formation of the migrants seems to be confused as they segregate themselves from their original homelands and the individual’s awareness of decentered attachments of being away from home is recognized among the migrants. “Transnationalism can again be associated with a fluidity of constructed style, social institutions and everyday practices”.

The other scholars, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) also differed from the others when they state that transnationalism is not a very new concept. Portes et.al. (1999) also mention that medieval trade was constituted by the “Venetian, Genoese and Hansa migrants” and they form an excellent example of transnationalism. With the moving of population across borders, linking people and institutions with each other have become a necessary act. Newer forms of

technologies and evolving modes of telecommunication aid in connecting the world online. “Time and space do not pose a restriction on the connectivity of these masses worldwide, where new technologies have connected them worldwide”.

The impact of the internet on the Diaspora has become one of the primary reasons for the negation that the distance and time pose as restrictions for daily human activity. As has been stated by Hiller and Franz (2004, 732), in their analysis of transnationalism among the Diasporic people: “one of the compelling aspects of the computer-mediated communication is that transcends the limitations of time and space”. In the same context, Panagakos and Horst (2006, 118), has also stated that the internet has enabled the Diaspora to expand their social world and thus “challenge the restrictive boundaries imposed by dominant host societies and the limitations of physical space and time”. The wide usage of the internet has also helped in aggravating the social circle of the immigrants. The immigrants in a new land have adopted the internet uses to create a “communicative network” that has resulted in a widening of the social or ethnic circle. This results in communicating with different people in and out the social sphere for the migrants. The internet has come up with new kinds of communicative media that help to “establish infrastructures for cultivating transnational subjectivities and political discourse”. According to Parham (2004) where she analyses the Haiti Global Village forum, she says:

“In contemporary times, Diasporic websites and forums have become the newest social bases for cultivating national subjectivity and discourse across borders. Immigrants and exiles may be physically displaced from the geographic borders of the nation, but their ability to create an independent reading publics provides them with space to analyze critically or express opposition to the policies of their home states. While community newspapers and radio stations within ethnic communities have always facilitated this

kind of expression, their use and impact have generally been restricted to local or truly transnational public spheres within dispersed national communities.” (Parham 2004, 202)

The phenomenon of online transnationalism is a pertinent feature which has enabled the fast pace of the internet in today’s world. As Miller and Slater state the need to explore the use of the Internet as “continuous with and embedded in other social spaces” and also accept the fact that interactions through internet “happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness”. (Miller and Slater 2000, 5)

The Internet is the primary reason for the eradication of distance and time as important constraints on the social structure of the human world. The Internet has also facilitated the expansion of the migrants’ social space, thereby challenging “the restrictive boundaries imposed by dominant host societies and the limitations of physical time and space”. The incessant use of the Internet in the contemporary world also generates social formations and aides the process of identity formation. Hepp (2009) also defines the concept of “diasporic communicative spaces” to diagnose the practice of transnationalism. According to Adams and Ghose (2003), the use of the Internet in the Diaspora is a very prominent component of contemporary practices of transnationalism. This space is also called virtual space. As has been mentioned earlier, the Internet binds the Diaspora with its community across the world; wherever they are dispersed. This process of binding has been termed as “bridgespace” by Adams and Ghose (2003, 415). This phenomenon also “helps in cultural preservation along with community and identity formation”.

This area of transnationalism creates a vast space for connecting the Diaspora with the home as well as they try to thicken the populace of their social and cultural circle. The innovations introduced in this field acts as a catalyst in renovating the structural and social morphologies, bringing in new spheres of self-expression and framing an identity for the migrants. While studying the Indian migrants in the USA, Adams and Ghose (2003), they have analyzed the concept of the “third space” developed by the Internet which acts as a bridge for the migrants with their homeland. They have affirmed that this virtual space in between links the Indian Diaspora and enables the flows and interactions that could not have taken place geographically; to take place thereby widening the sphere of the limits of transnationalism. The transnationalism and its practices have evolved beyond the household and family networks to include different organizations that have extended its sphere worldwide.

The concept of transnationalism has witnessed gradual changes in its meanings and conceptualization over the decades. The powerful influence of the internet acts “as a catalyst in deviating from the conventional structures of the definition”. The concept of transnationalism and identity in the context of migration has changed gradually. Over this approach, Roger Rouse (1995, 355) wrote:

“While a decade ago, disagreements about the frames for understanding (im)migrant experience were largely contained within the dominant models of bipolar landscapes and localized identities, they now focus much more widely on the relationship between these models and the alternative images of transnational social spaces and multi-local affiliations”.

According to Vertovec (2010, 574), the scenario of the contemporary transnationalism has evolved over the years in the context of “shifting political and economic circumstances in both sending and receiving contexts, sending countries”. The contemporary trends of migration has sent positive reviews to both the sending and receiving countries and have aggravated the social and economic structure of both the countries. As has been claimed by Ayse Caglar (2006, 15) in one of her articles on transnationalism, she states that transnationalism is “a new analytic optic which makes visible the increasing intensity and scope of circular flows of persons, goods, information and symbols triggered by international labour migration”.

A very crucial development that has occurred in the virtual space is the emergence of the “social web”. This development meant the moving away from the social websites to creating blogs and blogosphere, “from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up-front investment to an ongoing and interactive process”. (Flew 2007, 36)

The innumerable studies on migration have pointed out the fact that the migrants are always eager to retain their relationships with their homelands by all means. This has been facilitated by the innumerable sources of transnationalism. With the context of changing and restructuring identities, Rajan and Sharma (2006, 2) have coined the term ‘new cosmopolitans’ defining them as:

“... people who blur the edges of home and abroad by continuously moving physically, culturally, and socially, and by selectively using globalized forms of travel, communication, languages, and technology to position themselves in motion between at least two homes, sometimes even though dual forms of citizenship, but always in multiple locations (through travel, or through cultural, racial or linguistic modalities).”

The “creation of the self on the Internet is an outcome of the various ways of self-expression in various modes or on social media like Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest”. The vibrant nature of the Internet acts as a catalyst in promoting the migrant transnationalism. A development in this sphere is the emergence of the ‘social web’. According to Flew (2007, 36), this development meant a shift from websites to personal blogs, “from publishing to participation” an interactive process by itself. The Internet allows an array of mechanisms “from email to video chat to social media and mobile telephone”. In this continuously changing process of globalization, not just time and space, but also the socio-cultural changes and identity becomes a relevant mechanism. In this phase of my thesis, I would like to present the exploration of the creation of a transnational identity online through the food blogs by Indian women in the Diaspora. It also explores the process of creating a community by participating in this process.

The Internet has provided a space for “like-minded people to express their opinions and discuss shared issues”. The internet is being used in a number of ways and the focus on the voices that are represented through the internet also needs to be analyzed. It bears the power to transform the everyday lives of the people across the world. According to Hyde and Mitra (2000), cyberspace is often defined as a space which people or institutions use to voice themselves. Mitra and Watts (2002, 485) also adds that, “one of the most important aspects of cyberspace is the disappearance of boundaries that offer structure to real life”. The cyberspace as has been defined by Mitra and Watts (2002) as “a discursive space produced by the creative work of people whose spatial locations are ambiguous and provisional”. The cyberspace transcends all boundaries and this has been well portrayed by the women food bloggers who have tried to cross the geographical boundaries inspite of being a part of the Indian-American community and reach out to the world. Women are able to perceive the cyberspace as a domain where they can express themselves and

connect with the global audience. (Dietrich, 1997). As we observe the Diasporic communities, especially in the context of the Indian- American food bloggers, they use the internet as a tool to implement their own ways and reach out to the global readers or the audience. In the context of bloggers, who write and create content to frame their identity and create a community online, scholars like Earl (2006) have worked on the “web-based transnational linkages that enable geographically diverse groups to form close-knit political networks”. They always tend to reconnect with their homelands and the cyberspace has acted as an aiding tool to connect them not only with their homelands but also the world wide people through the virtual world. The voices of the Diasporic communities have also been represented by the virtual media. Watts (2001) has also argued stating that a voice must be concretized to find it’s own space. “This connection between the voice and internet becomes critical when the space to concretize the voice is not found”. The internet is such a space which has become free to all where people from all sections can come up with their own space in the virtual world. Mitra and Watts (2002) has also focused on the voice of women in the cyberspace which is quite an important one, where their voices have distinguished themselves among the others. Speaking about women and their voices, the Indian-American women and their voices have gained momentum, if we come to speak about their ideas of food blogging and reaching out to the world through blogging. This chapter is an elaboration on how the Indian- American women have tried to voice themselves out through the arena of blogosphere.

4.4. Ethnic Identity, blogs and women

According to Hall (1996), the whole concept of ethnic identity can be analyzed as a part of self concept that accumulates the individual to a particular ethnic group. This self identity can be created through various cultural dimensions. With the varied cultural dimensions, we can say that the idea of ethnic identity adheres to the group's beliefs, traditions, conventions and customs. The very central idea of this concept of ethnic identity is the sense of belonging.

The post 1965 migration wave brought about a new phase of immigrants from India, who love to cling to their age old traditions and customs and this can be categorized as one of the main characteristics of the immigrant society. This is how; they create their sense of ethnic identity and belonging. They also re-create their homes in the Diaspora by adhering to their ethnic traditions, customs and beliefs. While we talk about the creation of ethnic identity among the first generation migrants, this identity looks for threat of being challenged by the second generation migrants, who behave more like Americans rather than being Indians. They have least attachments with their ancestral beliefs. (Leonard, 2016)

Talking about ethnic identity, I should quote Hutnik (1991) who has categorised ethnic identities. It has been classified as: - “dissociative (traditionalist); assimilative (assimilationist); acculturative (bicultural); and marginal”. As has been quoted by Shamita Das Dasgupta (1998) where she quotes Phinney (1990), who offers a three step developmental stage for the process of ethnic development. “The initial stage is detected as the uninspected ethnic identity, the second stage as exploration and the third and the last one as consolidation”. As has been explained by Phinney, “in the first phase, the migrant community follows its own values and traditions. As the second phase of ethnic identity develops, the group begins to explore the relationship with the

host culture. Finally, when the final stage progresses, there is integration of both the cultures, whereas there is distinctiveness and showcasing of both the cultures”.

A lot of studies on migrants in the USA have observed that the migrants are more prone to get attached to their traditions, especially their taste for traditional food; an important marker of ethnic identity. As I have concluded from many studies conducted on Indian migrants in the USA, there have been a considerable proportion of women who have admitted that they have been objectified as the barriers of culture across the borders. As the keepers of Indian culture and tradition, women are also expected to look into most of the household chores. Though recent studies have derived that cooking is an art and there is no gender specific role to perform the ecstatic art of cooking, Asian Indian households have witnessed women’s presence as the sole one. As had been stated earlier about the role of women in the Diasporic kitchens, this chapter of my thesis would delve into the intricacies of how women have succeeded in putting up and framing transnational identities as individuals rather than just ‘housewives’ by re-creating memories from their homeland by blogging on food.

Women are mostly observed as “the rampant users of the Internet”. It has been observed that “women spend more time in social interactions on Internet rather than men”. They spend time in engaging themselves in interacting, blogging and this mediates them to create a ‘discursive self’. A survey on Internet⁵⁰ states that women are more observed online for social purposes than men. In the male dominated space of Internet, women are more ‘enthusiastic online’ than men. They are found to be “making attempts in imagining a utopian world where they are free to articulate their thoughts and pen them down”. The Internet also provides space for women of conservative societies to “remake themselves in a Western context by placing themselves at the centre of their

⁵⁰ Pew Internet Survey in the United States in 2005

biography”. (Kim 2011, quoted in Curran 2012). Studies have also suggested that women were found to be using the Internet while social networking; than men⁵¹.

The situation of creating a self-identity is more observant among women who live in both the worlds- the women who straddle across the homeland and the nation. For the Diasporic women, interactions on the Internet also allow them to connect to their own culture; thereby creating a nexus of two or more cultures. Their spaces in the Diaspora often expect them to adapt to the new routine of life that has elements of their ethnic culture incorporated in them. For the women in the Diaspora; specifically for the second generation migrants, there is always the mingling of two different cultures in certain characteristics defined by fashion, literature, music, cuisine and the like.

Surveys have justified that a large number of personal bloggers are women. According to studies, “there are over 600 million blogs, as of January 2019”.⁵² Women, the frequent users on the Internet are known to put out certain aims in using the Internet- in “self-expressing themselves, chatting, forming a community and most importantly forming an identity”. Majority of the bloggers comprise of the middle class educated Indian women in the Diaspora. As I have been talking about blogs, I would also like to point out the similarities of how blogs create a space for the women to create an identity and make lifestyle choices with enhanced learning. “Blogs are online directory of personal events, happenings in the lives of the bloggers and many other facets of life like parenting tools, cuisine, art, literature and many other lifestyle mechanisms. The blogs are always expected to create a virtual ‘I’ and is most commonly

⁵¹43 percent of web pages visited by women are social networking sites, compared to just 32 percent for men. (Nielsen reports, <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/smartphones-in-india-web-browsing-is-for-men-texts-are-for-women>.)

⁵² <https://growthbadger.com/blog-stats/> by Kyle Byers

observed in the personal blogs written by women. They try to create a virtual space where the readers can take a quick glance at their lives which mainly focuses on sharing their thoughts, views on certain aspects of life”. It can also be observed that women bloggers, who are commonly confined within the peripheries of their home; find it difficult to mix with others in the Diaspora. Therefore, they try to vent their feelings and thoughts, which expresses in the form of blogs. The age of writing diaries were very personal and coveted by many, but the diary did not find out its way to as many readers as the blogs do. Contrary to the ritual of diary writing, this forum of blogging makes the thoughts public and open to the world. Questions might also arise as to the ethics of publicizing the personal thoughts on the Internet. In one of the analysis of McCaughey (2010) where she objectifies the mask of the bloggers that they want to put on, when they are presenting themselves in the virtual world.

4.5. Studying cookbooks and women

“In the history of Western publishing, cookbooks have produced more bestsellers than any other genre”.⁵³ While I have been pondering on the food blogs written by women in the Diaspora, it would be unfair to shove out the mention of the earliest forms of writing down recipes, i.e; the cookbooks.

Cookbooks have been considered “as the most vibrant forms of recording recipes and memories that have been preserved for ages. Most of these cookbooks are interspersed with fiction, history and mythologies associated with food”. Cookbooks writing are synonymous with women authors, defining their identities and preserving their ethnic identities. Benedict Anderson (1983) in his book has tried to argue about the modern capitalist nation and the idea of print technology

⁵³ Quoted in Tobias 4 by cookbook historian Waldo Lincoln

which has shaped a new form of imagined community. Arjun Appadurai (1988, 3) states that cookbooks narrate “unusual cultural tales”. They describe cuisines which belong to different cultures and define the geographical boundaries and identities.

Cooking which was just a necessity in the earlier ages has turned out to be creative and fashionable activity over the centuries. The history of cookbooks can be traced back to about 150 years with the cookery book of Mrs. Beeton. Since then, there has been a wide change in all mechanisms in the domestic domain and attitudes to class, gender and “domestic intersect with the culture of food”. In all, the cookbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal the changes in food tastes, habits and culinary practices worldwide. These cookbooks also narrate the stories of the nations, “a tale of fears, snobberies and prejudices of the nation”. These cookbooks have become a tool to study the history of women and their lives. These books were not categorized as literary ones describing a deep and intimate relationship of food and kitchen with women. Cookery books turned out to be more than just recipe books; “they served as instruction manuals for life and became vessels for gender role information and distribution”.(Cope 2008,5) McFeely (2000,2) aptly states “as fashion magazines sell body images, cookbooks sell images of the cook as a scientist, artist, master chef, efficiency expert, perfecter of domestic bliss, earth protector or patriot”.

“The colonists started to publish their own cookbooks in the second half of the nineteenth centuries”. These cookbooks included a variety of dishes; which were recipes from the native lands and also authentic dishes. With the emergence of the modern and nuclear families, there has been a noticeable dearth of servants in the middle class households; cookbooks have acted as backups to the new and urban class. “The first British cookbook was published by Hannah Glasse’s in 1747 as *The Art of Cookery*. Many such women authors came up with surprisingly

new dishes. In the 1850s a book was published which was entitled *What Shall we Have for Dinner?* written by Catherine Dickens. These books depict the gradual changes in the concoction of curry in British India”.

Mrs. Beeton’s most famous book *Household Management* in 1861 was written for women who wanted to find out new ways of arranging their households. This book offered instructions for the mistress of the house on how to instruct the servants and cooks working to set up the home. In this book, Isabella Beeton also categorizes the various recipes and the intricacies of household work elaborating the social and economic scenario of the then British household. The many revised editions of this book dominated the major part of the nineteenth century.

A new book which was in succession to Beeton’s book was *Mrs. A.B. Marshall’s Cookery book* in the late 1880s. “Mrs. Marshall used to run a cookery school in London, instructing mistresses and cooks to prepare elegant and sumptuous dishes. The end of the First World War spotted the emergence of a number of cookbooks namely- Lady Algernon Percy’s *Our Grandmother’s Recipes* in 1916, *The Best Way: A book of Household Hints and Recipes* (soon after 1916). Margaret Blatch’s *One Hundred and One Practical Non-Flesh Recipes* in 1917 and Mrs. C.S. Peel’s *Eat-Less Meat Book* of 1917 had recipes with non-vegetarian dishes”. With the World War gaining opulence in the World, the survivors tried to be more economical in their daily eating habits and it was reflected in the books by Marion O. Neil’s *The Thrift Cookbook* which popularized “American foodstuffs and culinary practices”.

After the War, the economic conditions compelled the servants and household servants to vanish, thereby making the middle class women to emerge as the housewife. The cookbooks changed with this situation and became more colourful and thriving with life. This age saw the coming up

of books by Cathrine Ivy's book *When The Cook is Away* in 1928. "In this phase, the women of the house had to cook, decorate and formulate a routine in the household and the contemporary books made her task look more fashionable and stylish. This age was difficult, but the monotonous cooking chore was made fun with the aid of Lady Jekyll, Lady Sosynby, Alice Martineau and Ruth Lowinsky by their colourful and engrossing cookbooks".

In this woman dominated field of cookbooks, "a young French intellectual named Marcel X. Boulestin made his way by writing *Simple French Cooking in English Homes* in 1923. He was the first male to introduce himself as the 'first-ever television cook' in 1973 along with writing many articles in books and magazines".

With the end of 1980s, the style of food writing changed its course once more. The food prepared concentrated more on the comfort side of it. Nigella Lawson's *Plum and Peccan Crumble* in *How to be a Domestic Goddess: Baking and the Art of Comfort cooking* was somewhat "comfortingly autumnal" (Lawson, 2000,128, 132). Many classic cookbooks like Margaret Costa's *Four Season's Cookery Book*, 1970 are being re-issued by cooks and chefs of the contemporary times to revive the food of the classical age.

Though cookbooks are categorized under a different genre, they also attribute to the vast genre of women's writings in the field of cuisine. Studies have observed that women have been consistent in the writing of food. "The kitchen is considered a setup for the identity formation and cookbooks have played a major role in shaping the discourse of women and family. The connection between women and kitchens has been remarkably noted through cookbooks, magazines 'as well as promotional booklets offering recipes'". Le Dantec-Lowry (2008,102) aptly states "[a]s historical documents- supplying information about the publishing practices,

available ingredients, food fashions or household technology of the past- cookbooks reveal much of the societies that produce them”. Authors of the cookbooks hailed from all over the world. Asian Indians recorded their recipes as personal diaries of recipes, which they passed down to future generations of the family.

Cookbooks are not static, but continue to change in culinary and cultural aspects. The cookbooks from the immigrant communities helps to preserve their ethnic traits, reconnect them with their past and share their culinary and cultural habits in the Diaspora.

4.6. Women in the Diaspora and food blogs

The Diaspora are ‘transnationally situated’, traversing through the world, simultaneously “rooted in particular histories, localities and community allegiances”. (Srinivas, 2006, 211) Food blogs allow re-creating and remembering memories and offer a dynamic platform to display their skills and construct an identity for the bloggers. Food blogs, also categorized as personal blogs lay down a space for exchanging the different stories of recipes, techniques of cooking and connecting with the world, i.e; “progeny, family, community or readers from other communities”. Bloggers use communication which is mediated by computers to “reformulate both the self and the place that the self dwells in”, continuously and collaboratively (Sahoo and De Kruijf, 2014, xx). This space attempts to study women food bloggers in the Diaspora and examine the process as how they participate in formulating their ethnic and global identities in the Diaspora and how they reconnect with the world. According to Levi Strauss (1963), food is a medium of communication. Not only is food used for nutritional purposes but can also be used to understand the cultural and societal implications of the society to which the human belongs. He also urges to think on the ‘semiotic and communicative function’ of the food. The voices of the

food bloggers are also used to signify how food acts as a barrier in transcending borders and communicating with the readers across the globe. Food blogs are a new method of restructuring the identity and writing down of recipes and memories from the past. “Blogging is considered an act which connects with the everyday lives of the bloggers, making decisions on the daily acts of cooking or maintaining household chores”. Some of the blogs that I have studied have also divided their blogs into many other aspects other than cooking and food. For example, the blog named *An Artsy Appetite* by Sumana Doss Burman from Bay Area, California, has divided her blog into three segments- food, art and travel. She has tried to incorporate these sections of living to make the blog more profound in creativity and ethnicity. Rumela of the vlog, *Rumela’s World* also adds up by stating, “*Though my vlog on YouTube is mostly a lifestyle vlog, where I showcase my daily activities, I also feel free to include the recipes that I prepare at my home. The typical traditional recipes that I prepare on special Indian occasions ignites my nostalgic feelings for home*”. Most of the blogs are run by women, who are often home makers and some are working alongside cooking and blogging. Manali asserts by saying, “*I blog fulltime so this is my full time job. I don’t think many people in India would be aware of this but blogging is a quite big industry here. I didn’t imagine my blog to be my source of income when I started, but now I can’t be more pleased with the result*”. Manali, the blogger of *Cook with Manali* says that she started her blog as a hobby, but now she is a full time blogger which reflects how she portrays her everyday life and her cooking skills in her blog. Food blogs makes the bloggers to break their silence and shape a space where this activity is recognized “as a vibrant public performance”. The food blog is considered as a means of self expression which is very close to memoirs. Cooking has been represented as a vibrant and rich image, quite contrary to the monotonous and boring idea of cooking prevalent in earlier days. Along with food blogs, which

is decorated with colourful pictures of prepared food, the updated instruments used in cooking, etc., various YouTube channels have also made the cooking process seem glamorous. Varsha of the blog, *Varsha679* claims, “*Migrating to the USA has helped me to create a special space in the world of blogging. Primarily I started with preparing a typical desi lunch, but eventually blogging is not just a stress buster for me, but it has also helped me to experience the success that I could get by my cooking skills and sharing it with the world*”. As my personal memories of home reverberate in my mind, food is one medium which strongly connects me with home. While I have been surfing through some YouTube channels and food blogs (for research purposes), the preparing of dishes, the presentation, the rich and vibrant colors of food makes me drool and yearn for the food. It is to point out the fact that food blogs have made it an easy process to cook which was earlier inaccessible to the Diaspora. With regard to the purpose of blogging, Pritha states, “*I only publish recipes of food that I love to eat and do not follow ‘food trends’ blindly. I also incorporate slices of life stories and high resolution photographs. I blog when it gives me happiness. When I find it tiresome and a strain on my schedule, I chose not to blog during those times*”.

The food bloggers that I plan to discuss in this chapter writes more about their ethnic cuisine and how their mothers and female relatives have formed a contributory place in all of their blogs. “Like their cousins the cookbooks” (Salvio, 2012), the food blogs also offer primarily a female audience and readership which explores daily events and tastes of lifestyle- mainly the culinary part; cutting across the geographical boundaries. These blogs offer a digital space both for the readers and the bloggers; thereby creating an interactive atmosphere. Kallol, a male blogger for *Tasty but Healthy food*, which runs on Youtube, opines on a different note saying, “*Me and my wife were thinking of helping the society. So, we thought of starting a minimal profit channel on*

YouTube to help people by funding 75% of the channel's earnings to the poor". Our cuisine defines our identity and writing of these recipes narrates the "struggle to produce a product" (Longacre 1996, 48). It also tries to solve the "puzzle of menu planning for the family". (DeVault 1991, 48) With the evolution of technological tools, the Internet provided a space "for empowerment through construction and connection". According to Sarkar, (2013, 102), "Each food blog is underpinned by a metamorphosis story: how a wife/mother/homemaker/career-woman transforms into an expressive cook/writer". Most of the blogs that I have studied are composed of layered narratives of stories of their past, recording narrations of personal and cultural identity development. The blogs function as "collective memory" that tries to imagine the past "in service of the present and potentially the future". (D. Ben-Amos & L. Weissberg, ed.1999, 299) Vaishali, the blogger for *Holy Cow* also professes her idea on blogging stating, "*I am a vegetarian and in my blog I try to cook and share recipes which are vegetarian and it also displays the myriad Indian recipes which can be cooked without meat*".

The blogs also has a role to play in circulation of the Indian cuisine globally. At this juncture, when Indian food has been trying to create a place in the global market, blogs have incessantly contributed to it, by creating a "cosmopolitan status for home-cooked Indian food". (Hegde 2014) This form of digital media allows for "a consideration of the ways these media have become central to the articulation of cherished beliefs, ritual practices and modes of being in the world". (Coleman 2010, 489) The blogs represent a medium of the circulation of Indian food globally, constructing identity in the well defined Diasporic experience.

4.7. Reading of the blogs

With my survey, I have been able to get hold of about 41 food bloggers who had been active respondents to my interview. I would like to present a short glimpse of the blogs and how they have been structured and designed.

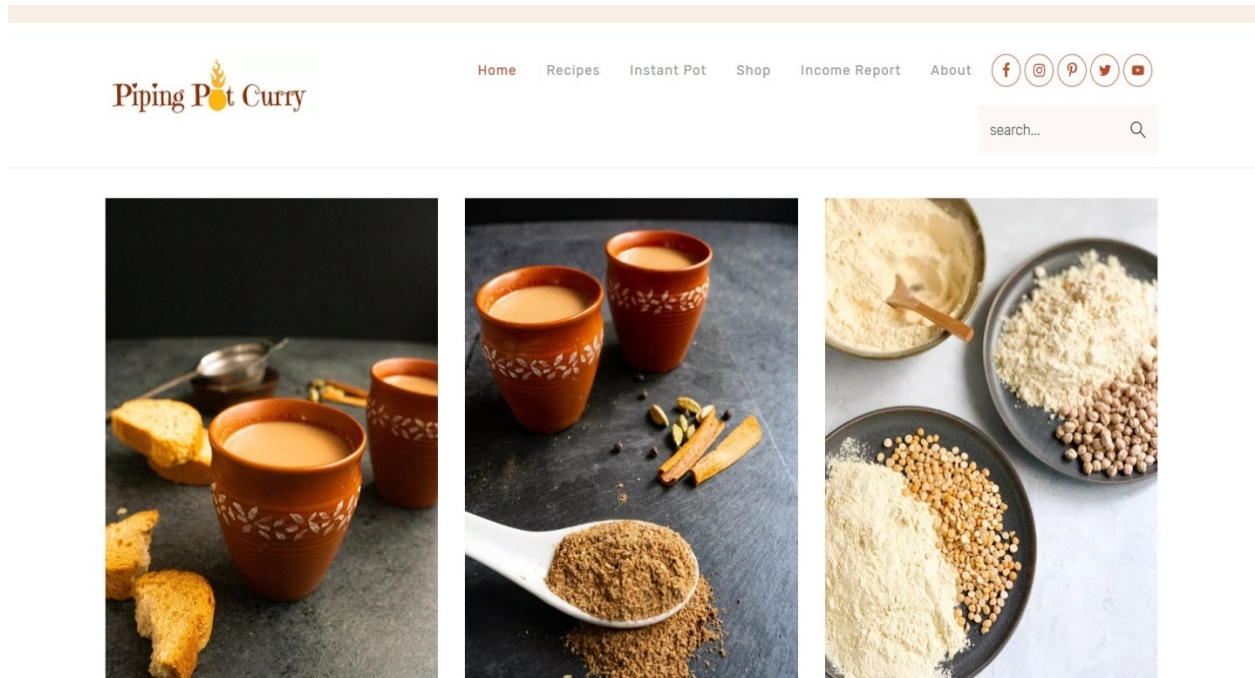


Fig. 1. Screenshot of the blog 'Piping Pot Curry'

Blogger: Meeta

Location: San Jose, California

Origin: Mumbai, India

Blogging since: Feb, 2017.

This blog has an interesting and unusual name with a simple look. It has been divided into layers where the blog readers can find numerous recipes, some instant pot recipes, a section where one can shop various kitchen accessories, Indian spices and the like and also a section where the

blogger elaborates on the money making process at blogging. The ‘About Me’ is an essential part of each blog and it is mandatory.⁵⁴

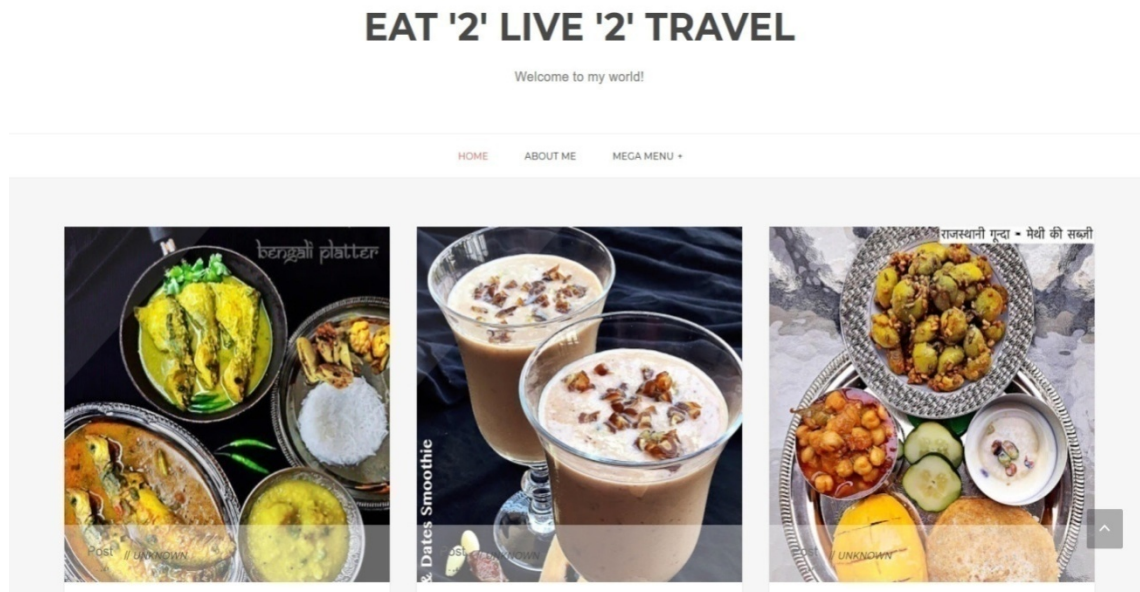


Fig. 2. Screenshot of the blog Eat 2 Live 2 Travel

Blogger: Anshu Bhatnagar

Location: United States of America

Origin: Rajasthan, India

Blogging since: 2008

The name itself conveys the content of the blog. This blog is mainly comprised of dishes prepared mostly in the bloggers' home and at her in laws' place. The first page of this blog summarises the fusion of Bengali and Rajasthani cuisine and the later pages also do the same. Her recipes also narrate some memorable stories associated with the dishes. The love for authentic cuisine signifies her identity as an Indian who is reminiscent of her homeland and also elaborates on the expeditions in India and around the world. Her immense love for food motivates her to continue blogging.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Blog Address: <https://pipingpotcurry.com/>

⁵⁵ Blog Address: <http://www.eat2live2travel.com/>



Fig.3. Screenshot of the blog The Picky Eater

Blogger: Anjali Shah

Location: San Francisco, Bay Area

Origin: San Francisco, Bay Area

Blogging since: 2011

This blog, *The Picky Eater* is formed by Anjali Shah. She has been born and brought up in the USA and she doesn't seem to have any early memories of India. Her blog is very well decorated with a very fascinating name. The name *Picky Eater* signifies a child who is choosy about his/her choice of food, but Anjali makes it sure that her recipes are healthy and appetizing for her family and shares her culinary knowledge to the world. Her recipes combine delicacies for children of all ages. The blog is filled with the celebratory figure of Anjali where her blog contains all the magazines and channels in which she has featured. She also provides her share of knowledge on health and wellness in her blog. A regular follower of her blog would find a new post every week.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Blog Address: <https://picky eaterblog.com/welcome-2/>



Fig.4. Screenshot of the blog My Friday Food Swings

Blogger: Somdatta Sengupta

Location: California

Origin: Kolkata, West Bengal

Blogging since: 2014

This blog can ethnically be called as a Bengali blog showcasing mostly Bengali authentic dishes. The design and the pictorial representation of the blog are simple yet appealing. The labels in the blog also describe a section where one can book cooking classes with the blogger herself. The blog contains recipes hailing more from Bengal, elaborated with some original stories associated with the dishes. This blog stands with a purpose to document some memories of family and food for her daughter. Her blog also describes tips to recreate classics in American kitchens. Her passion for food, writing and photography motivates her to blog on food.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Blog Address: <https://www.myfridayfoodswings.com/>

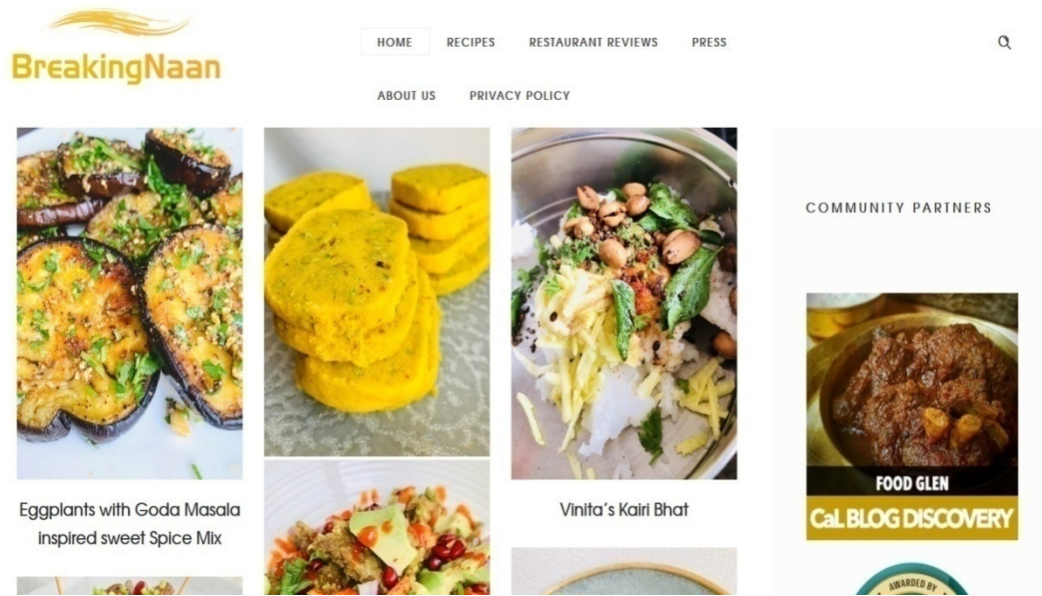


Fig. 5. Screenshot of the blog Breaking Naan

Blogger: Vikram Bapat

Location: Madison, Wisconsin

Origin: Pune, Maharashtra

Blogging since: 2016

A very unusual blog; managed by a male blogger in Wisconsin. Within this arena of blogging, which is largely a female dominated area, Bapat has made his way into this world of blogging by sharing some authentic Marathi, other Indian recipes and fusion foods, along with a section which provides reviews of different restaurants in areas like Madison, Florence, San Francisco Area, Pune and Chicago. The blog brings out the results of new approaches with local ingredients, new ingredients applied to traditional recipes. It also brings out some studies of traditional recipes in the context of the modern kitchens outside India. The purpose of blogging for Bapat is to connect with like minded people who are passionate about cooking and sharing their cuisine with everyone.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Blog address: <https://www.breakingnaan.com/>

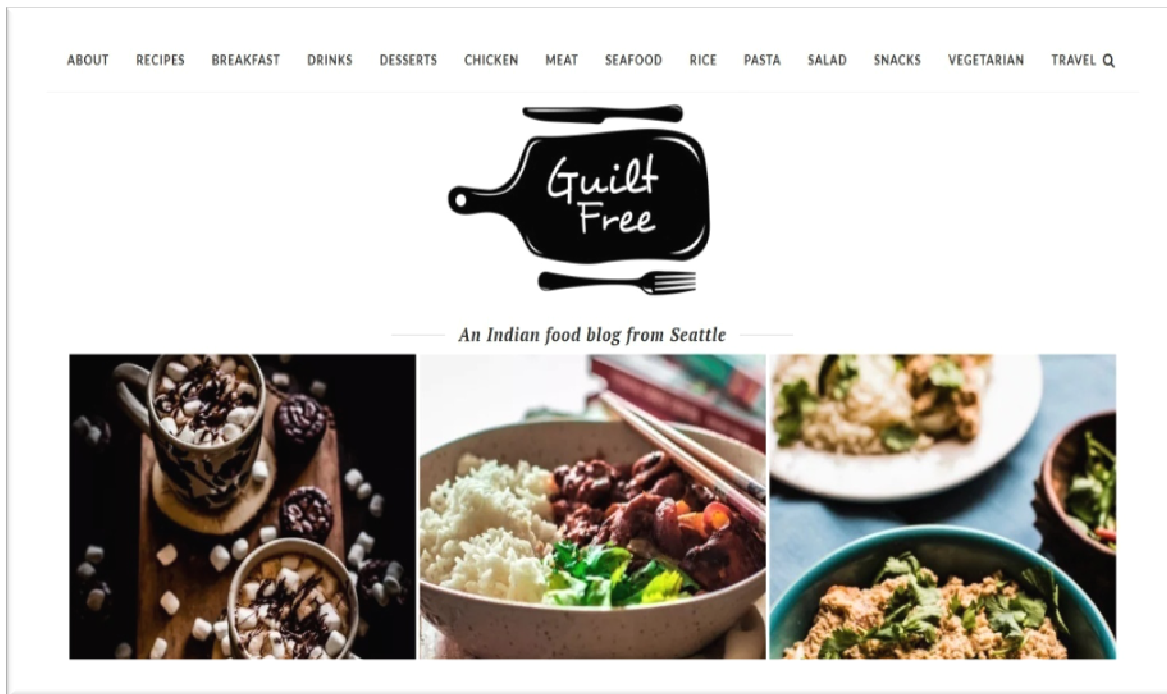


Fig.6. Screenshot of the blog Guilt Free

Blogger: Pritha Chakrabarty

Location: Seattle

Origin: Kolkata, India

Blogging since: 2014

This blog is created by a passionate foodie, who has confessed on thinking about food and food is what makes her “world go round”. The title of the blog itself depicts her strong passion for food and indulgence in cuisines from all over the world, with a subtitle stating it clear about being Indian residing in Seattle. The blog offers a wide array of foods ranging from Indian food to international. The blog does not follow any standard food trends, but publishes recipes of food that is loved. The recipes are incorporated with slices of life stories and high definition photographs. Readers of this blog might find a couple of posts every month. The purpose of

Pritha is to build and express relationship with food either through written medium or visual medium.⁵⁹

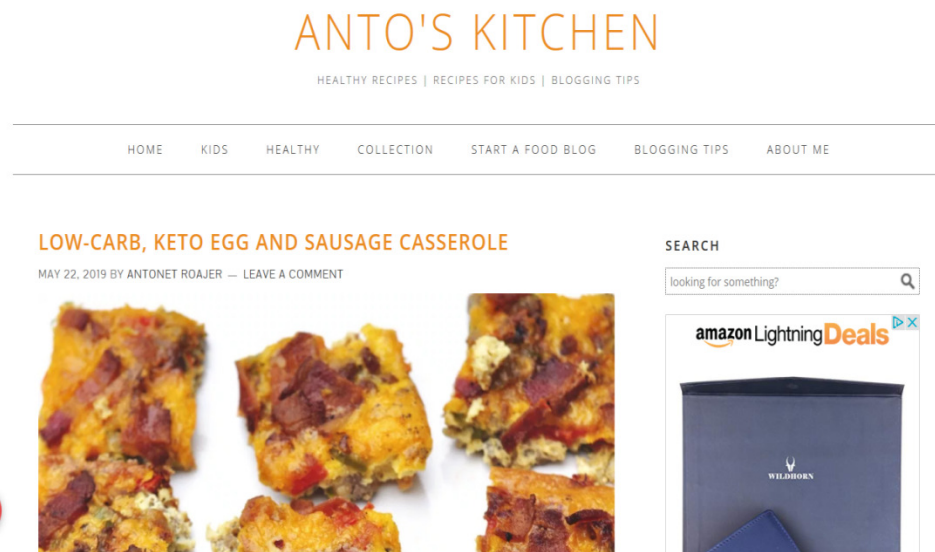


Fig.7. Screenshot of the blog Anto's Kitchen

Blogger: Antonet Roajer

Location: Carmel, Indiana

Origin: South India

Blogging since: 2015

Blog Address: <https://www.antoskitchen.com/>

The name signifies the virtual kitchen created by Antonet in her blog. She has divided her blog into sections which shares recipes for kids and recipes to be healthy. An important feature which distinguishes this blog is the section of the blog, which she has dedicated to tips on how to start a food blog and tips of blogging. Her sole purpose of blogging was to earn money and get in touch with people globally. A regular follower of her blog would definitely see 2 posts every week with high quality pictures. She is also the author of a few cookbooks. She loves to experiment

⁵⁹ Blog Address: <http://guiltfreeblog.com/>

with traditional cuisines and shares cooking ideas for busy people. Her cooking ideas are creative and are quick to prepare at home.⁶⁰

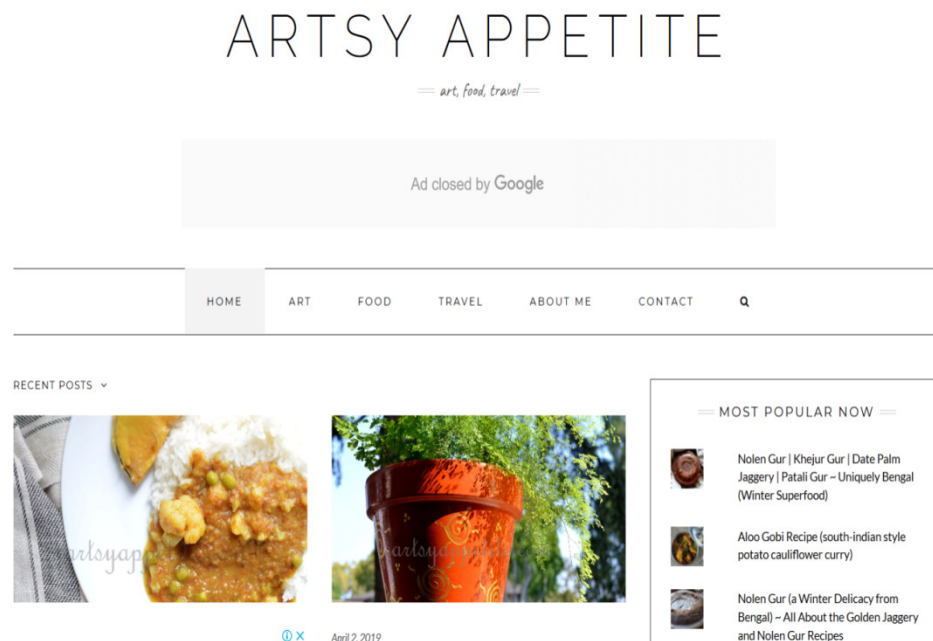


Fig 8. Screenshot of the blog Artsy Appetite

Blogger: Sumana Doss Barman

Location: Bay Area, California

Origin: Kolkata, India

The name of the blog says it all. Along with being a food blog, this blog also has been dedicated to art, craft and travel. Apart from being a blogger, Sumana is a teacher in a school. After moving to the US and experimenting with the culinary art, she started to write about food and the traditional recipes inherited from the family. The recipes are always accompanied with her stories of childhood and memories of food. Her blogs offer a post once every week or two weeks with usually a tried and tested family recipe, styled in a bowl or a plate generally during

⁶⁰ Blog Address: <https://www.antoskitchen.com/>

weekends. She says that blogging is her ‘creative outlet’ where she shares, writes and speaks about something very close to her heart and culture-food.⁶¹



Fig.9. Screenshot of the blog Food Fitness Beauty and More

Blogger: Aanchal Gupta

Location: Georgia, USA

Origin: Kolkata India

Blogging since: August 2016

This blog by Aanchal Gupta speaks not only about food, but also offers tips on being healthy, travel, beauty and fitness. It also offers kitchen tips on how to store garlic or how to make *diyas*. Her blog posts come only about 2-3 times a week. The main motivations behind her blog are the readers of the blog who have been constant supporters and her never ending passion for trying and developing new recipes. Readers love to know some kitchen hacks, home remedies and easy as well as traditional recipes. A distinguishing factor prevalent in her blog is the section in

⁶¹ Blog Address: <https://artsyappetite.com/>

recipes which has been devoted to food without onion and garlic; which many other blogs fail to provide. This indicates the religious touch to the menus and showcases the ritualistic procedures attached to preparing food.⁶²

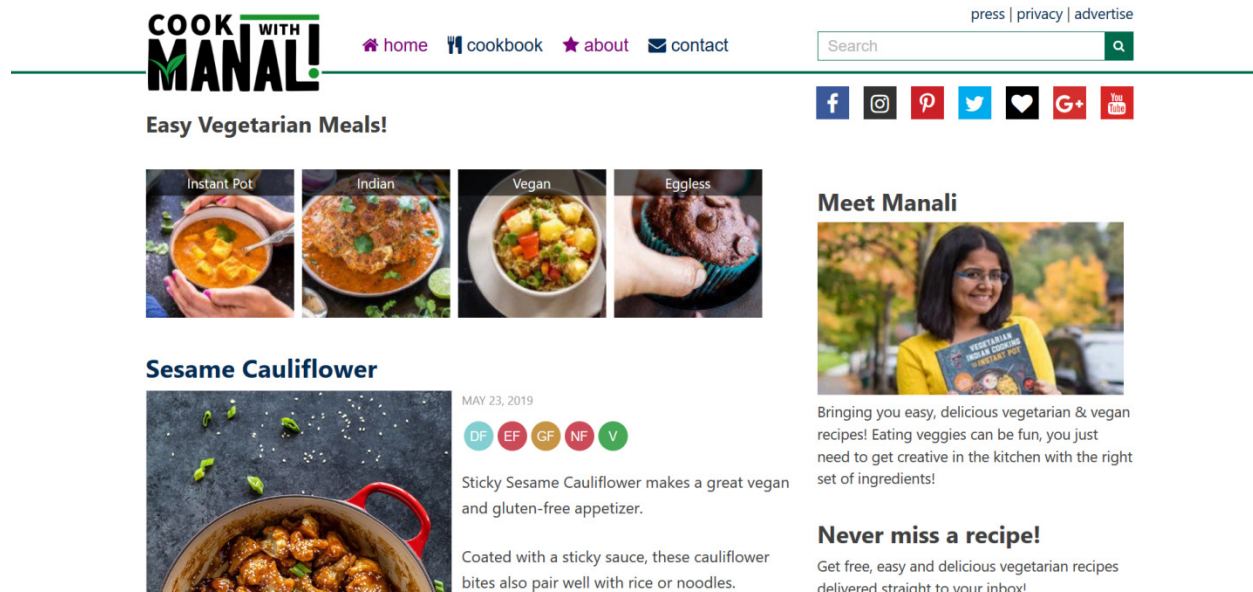


Fig.10. Screenshot of the blog Cook With Manali

Blogger: Manali Singh

Location: Seattle

Origin:Uttar Pradesh,India

Blogging since: 2013

Manali in her blog *Cook With Manali* presents a vegan blog which brings “easy, delicious vegetarian and vegan recipes” (<https://www.cookwithmanali.com/meetme/>). A medical doctor by degree turned a food blogger presents this absolutely interesting blog for vegetarians. This blog was started to document some delicious recipes that was cooked in her kitchen to spend her time. Blogging is a source of income for her and the love that she has in sharing the pictures of the cooked keeps the blog going.⁶³

⁶² Blog Address: <https://www.foodfitnessbeautyandmore.com/>

⁶³ Blog Address: <https://www.cookwithmanali.com/>

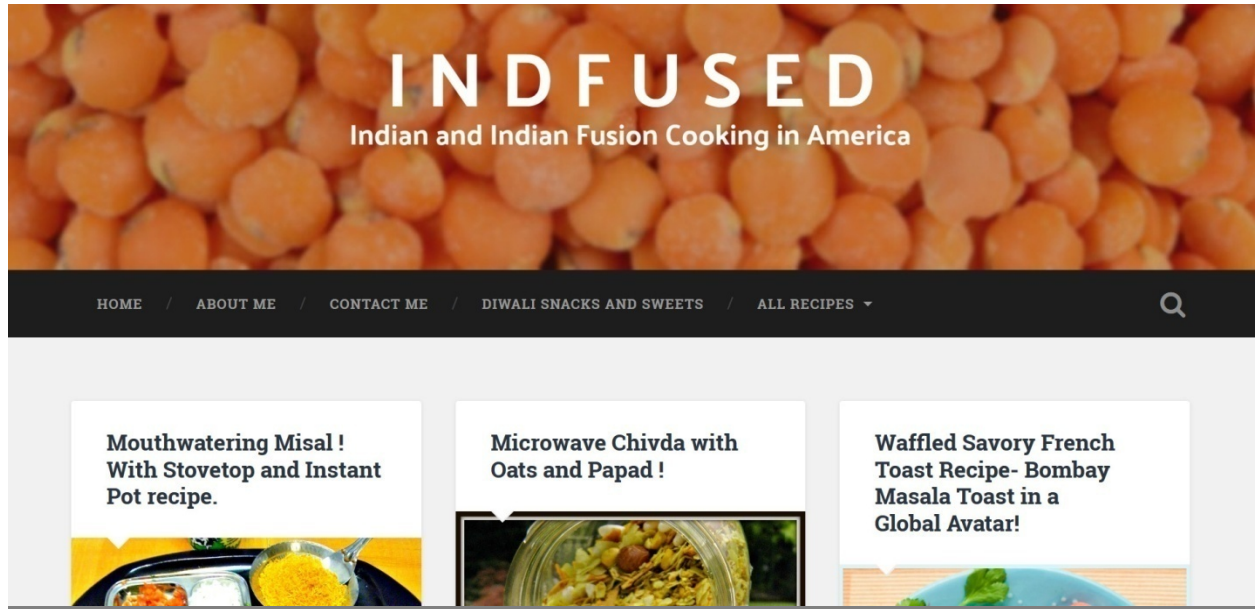


Fig.1.11

Blogger: Sandhya Rege Nadkarni

Location: Lexington, MA

Origin: Maharashtra, India

Blogging since: 2014

Indfused by Sandhya Rege Nadkarni is a blog focusing on the Indian and Indian fusion cooking based in America. This blog with 300 recipes comes with posts twice a week. Healthy and fusion cooking comprises this blog. A rich variety of regional recipes, history and tradition of food in India forms the main ingredient of the blog to be shared with people all across the world.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Blog address: <https://indfused.com/>

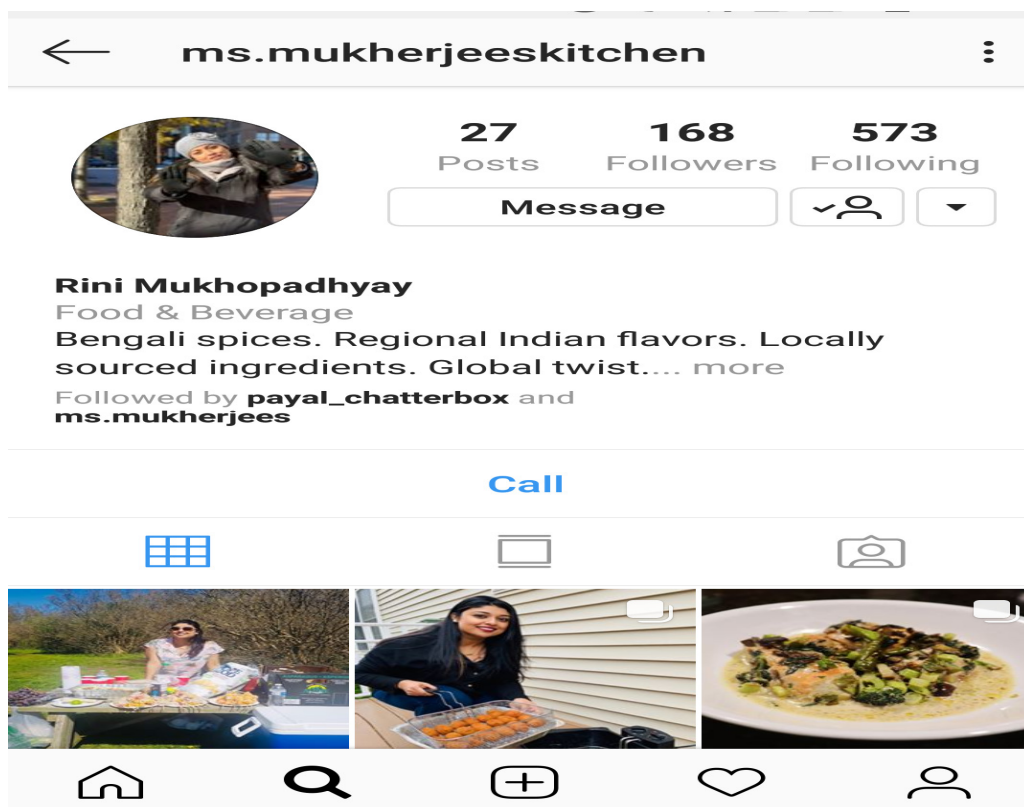


Fig.12. Screenshot of the blog Ms. Mukherjee's Kitchen

Blogger: Rini Mukhopadhyay

Location: Norwalk, Connecticut

Origin: Kolkata, India

Blogging since: 2017

This blog is an outcome of the blogger's intense love and interest for food and cooking. It is run only on Instagram on a starting level with a single post every week. The variety of pictures of prepared dishes by Rini gives a glimpse into her virtual kitchen. This post comprises of an array

of traditional Bengali dishes along with the other regional cuisines of India and a lot of fusion recipes.⁶⁵

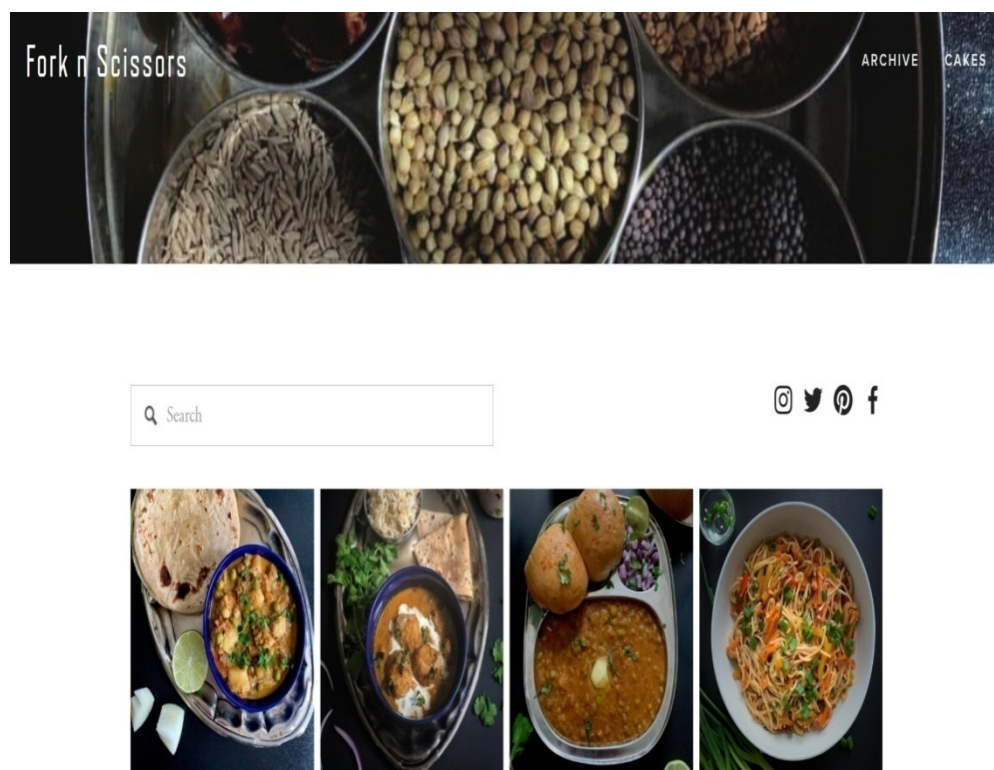


Fig.13. Screenshot of the blog Fork n Scissors

Blogger: Sanika Khadilkar

Location USA, presently placed in Canada

Origin: Maharashtra, India

Blogging since: 2015

This blog is designed in a simplistic way, with the photos of the prepared dishes and the ingredients. The blogger usually tries out the recipe and then takes a photograph of it and later posts in the blog. This blog has been separately devoted to the art of baking and the archive has numerous posts of breakfast, international, snacks, daals, parathas, rotis and the like, subzis

⁶⁵ Blog address: ms.mukherjeeskitchen (on Instagram)

recipes. Amongst the display of the dishes, the one thing which this blog lacks is there is no mention of the blogger herself in an 'About Me' section.⁶⁶

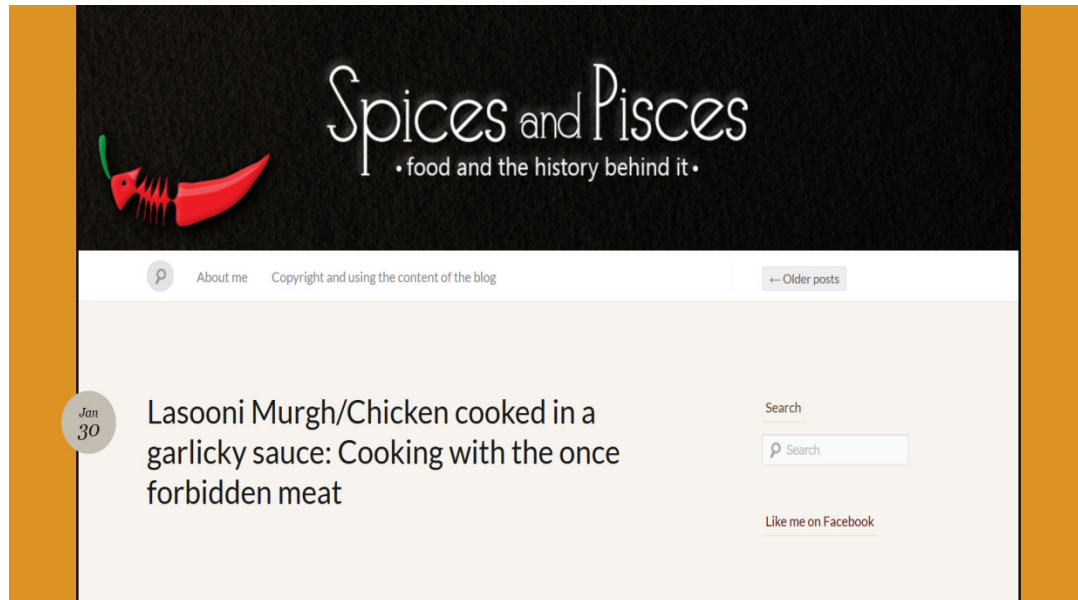


Fig.14. Screenshot of the blog Spices and Pisces

Blogger: Soma Chowdhury

Location: US

Origin: Kolkata, India

Blogging since: 2012

The most interesting feature of this blog is that it narrates the history of the dish, along with the history of some of its ingredients, focusing on traditional recipes and food photography. The blog serves the purpose of imparting knowledge about the histories related to the food we eat. The post also features some personal posts accompanied by the culinary travels made by the blogger. The colourful snaps of the recipes and their histories add a different angle to the blog altogether.

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⁶⁶ Blog address: <https://www.forknscissors.com/>

⁶⁷ Blog address: <https://spicesandpisces.wordpress.com/>

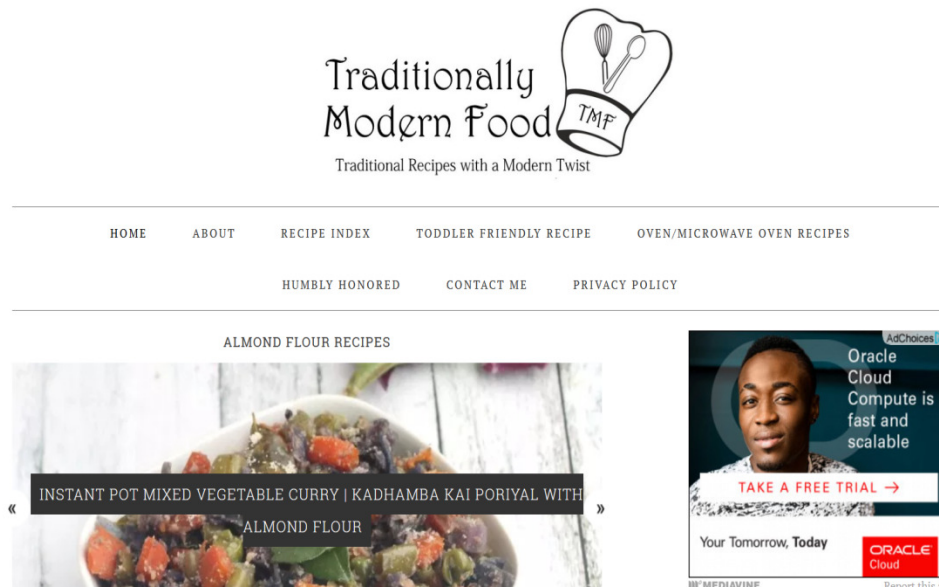


Fig.15. Screenshot of the blog Traditionally Modern Food

Blogger: Vidya Srinivisan

Location: US

Origin: Chennai, India

Blogging since: 2014

The name of the blog itself suggests that it is composed of innumerable traditional dishes with a twist or a tweak in the recipe. This blog was started to keep a record online, sharing with the world and not just a recipe book only to be kept with her and later inherited by others in the family. Most of the recipes are learnt from her family members, friends and other cookbooks. Vidya writes at least 2-3 recipes every week. Along with traditional foods in the front row, the blog has also been adorned with many international dishes.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Blog Address: <http://traditionallymodernfood.com/>

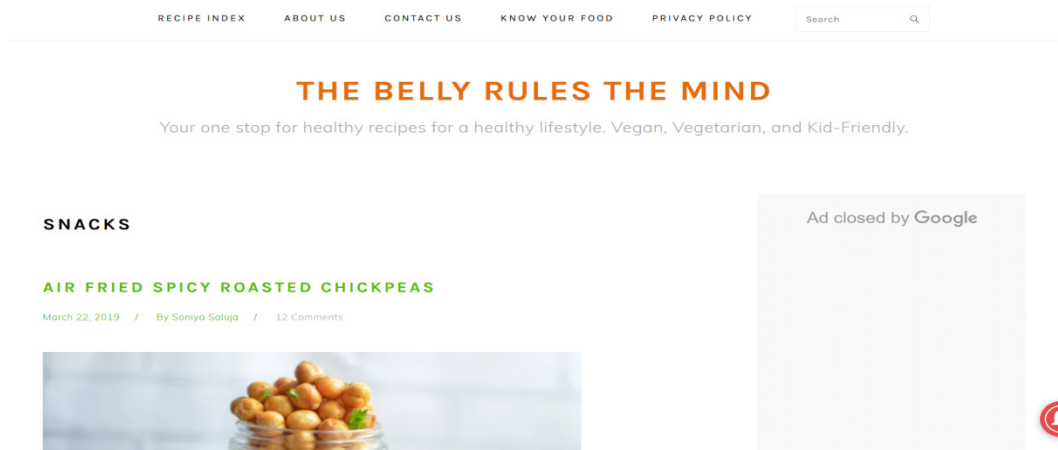


Fig. 16. Screenshot of the blog The Belly Rules the Mind

Blogger: Anvita and Soniya

Location: North Carolina, US

Origin: Mumbai, India

Blogging since: 2014

This blog has been set up to document the healthy food that they had prepared to feed their children. It is a vegetarian health food blog, which comes up with 2 recipes every week. The recipes posted are mainly useful for busy moms who wish to lead a healthy lifestyle. A full time business for this joint venture, this blog is more of a creative outlet which helps share recipes with mothers.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Blog Address: <https://thebellyrulesthemind.net/category/recipes/courses/snacks-recipes/>

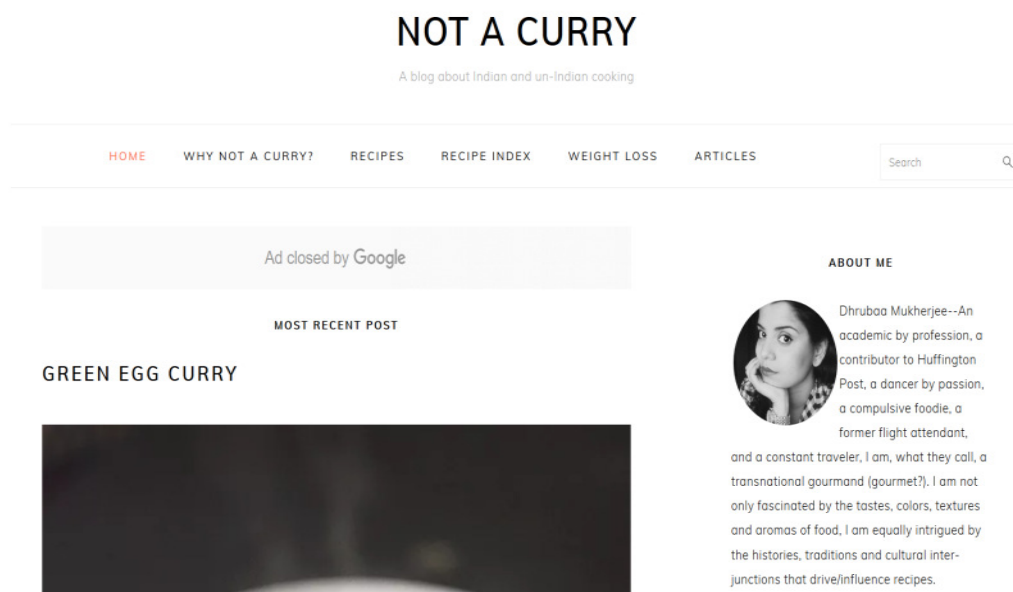


Fig.18. Screenshot of the blog Not A Curry

Blogger: Dhrubaa Mukherjee

Location: New York, USA

Origin: Kolkata, India

Not A Curry, a blog by Dhrubaa Mukherjee, settled in New York brings out recipes from home. An infrequent blogger nowadays, Dhrubaa used to post at least 2 recipes every month. This blog is a result of her love for food, cooking and history of food.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Blog Address: <http://notacurry.com/>

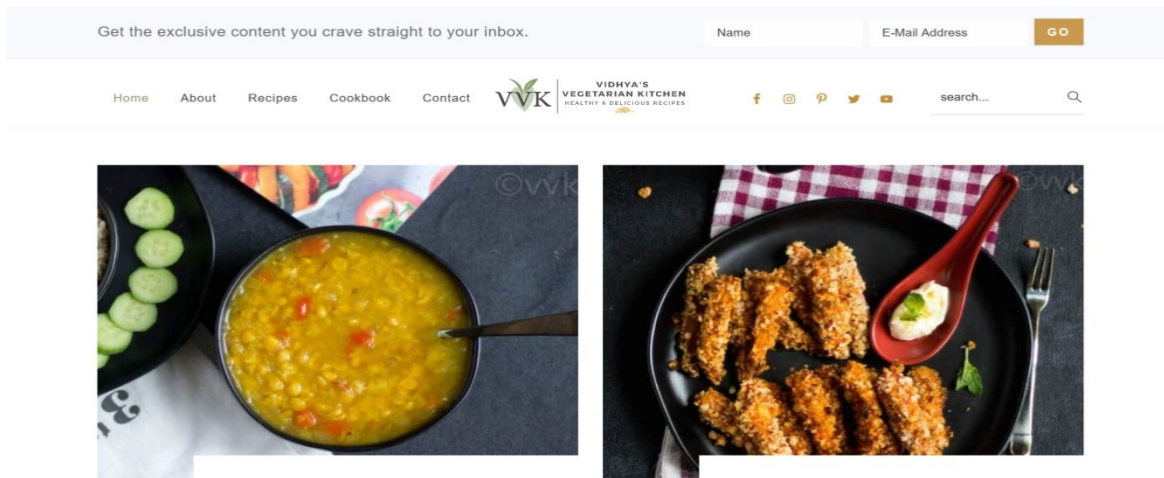


Fig.19. Screenshot of the blog Vidhyas Home Cooking

Blogger: Srividhya G

Location: California, USA

Origin: Tamil Nadu, India

Blogging since: 2009

The blog documents her mother's recipes and also includes some of her own fusion food as well. Her blog showcases ample traditional dishes from South India with some exciting stories from her kitchen, experiences and some product reviews as well. The blog followers would find vegetarian dishes from across the world with three posts every week.⁷¹

4.8. Analysis of the blogs

I have tried to analyze the blogs based on various dimensions. The reading of the blogs portrays how the blogs have been presented and in the next part of the thesis I have tried to analyze the blogs according to the sub-headings.

⁷¹ Blog Address: <https://www.vidhyashomecooking.com/>

4.8.1. Identity

Food blogs have been observed to construct an identity for the bloggers by placing the recipes ornate with memories, observations as a part of the blog. The food blogs have mediated a globalized Indian identity, specifically for the rising middle class, who form the major portion of the Indian Diaspora living in the United States. A meticulous and detailed reading of these food blogs reveals the fact how these women have been building their presence online, thereby constructing an identity for their transnational selves. After reading the blogs, my task of looking out for clues of identity in these bloggers in the Diaspora have become prominent. Most of these bloggers have put forth their ideas of their authentic cuisine, presenting along the social, cultural or political factors to create a self assessed identity in the Diaspora. Food is central to identity formation; the way in which human individual is “constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the food he/she chooses to incorporate”. (Fischler 1988, 275). Identity formation forms an integral part of blogging. As I have discussed earlier in the thesis that food is a marker of ethnic identity in the host land, creating memories of the past helps to recreate the ethnic identity in the Diaspora. “For the Diasporic community, food assumes a new meaning, a symbol, a vehicle for reproducing culture”. (Khondker in Reeves and Rai 2008, 137). The bloggers have responded to assert that the women food bloggers have tried to create an identity in the Diaspora by blogging. Blogging creates a space to link the migrants with the world as the readership increases and the authentic cuisine is promoted all through the world. As Camargo Heck (2003, 208) writes,

“The need to maintain a traditional identity within a foreign country is so strong that food may develop a mythical status, a ‘more authentic’ flavor, than actually found in the country of origin.”

In the blog *The Bong Mom's Cookbook*, Sandeepa Mukherjee Datta constructs her multiple identities by fragmenting her identity as *A Bong*, *A Mom*, *A Cook*. In the blog *Zaiqa*, Mona, the blogger identifies herself as

*“Hyderabadi foodie muslimah, a home cook, mother, writer and blogger... I intend to inspire all Hyderabadis to share their... recipes... My blog is ... filled with nostalgia... and stories ... a journal of my recipes, both traditional and trial and error ones.”*⁷²

As my study proceeded, I was amazed to interview some bloggers who were tech savvy women and who had migrated from India to create a self-identity as computer professionals. They have somehow created an identity for themselves by shuffling between home and food which resulted in blogging. In *Anto's Kitchen*, the blogger, Antonet Roajer identifies herself as

*“... an IT professional turned into a full-time blogger.... I hold a professional degree in computers, I am passionate about cooking, photography and blogging.”*⁷³

While speaking on identity, Crenshaw (1991) speaks on identity politics and also considered “intersectional identities” for women of colour. Her theories of intersectionality spoke on race, gender and identity among the marginalized women of colour. This thesis also speaks about the Indian-Americans, i.e; the migrant women who are also considered as the ‘other’ in the host land. Identity formation becomes quite an important factor among the migrant societies and blogging has been quite a helping tool to reconstruct their identity despite being the marginalized group of the populace.

Most of the bloggers, who have been the respondents in my survey; have been helped by their technology friendly husbands, with a few exceptions of course. Manali Singh, the founder of

⁷² Mona, *Zaiqa: Recipes and Reflections- Diary of a Hyderabad foodie*. <https://zaiqa.net/about/>

⁷³ *Anto's Kitchen*. <https://www.antoskitchen.com/about-me/>

Cook With Manali is the sole chef and photographer of her blog, while she mentions her husband to be the technical help. She says,

*“Sarvesh also handles technical stuff on this blog. The blog design, logo, everything is done by him. I have zero technical knowledge so it’s all him.”*⁷⁴

Many have studied blogs as “digital journals, extensions of self-representational writing characterized by reflexive, diachronic accounts of self”. (Hegde 2014, 91) The bloggers have asserted this well in their display of the array of food and well organized virtual kitchens. They have an indefinite urge to style and organize their virtual kitchens always ready for visitors.

In the Diasporic context, it has been observed, that the Diaspora often tends to be caught between maintaining their ethnic identity along with imbibing the culture offered by the host country. Though this ambivalent attitude has been prominently discerned among the second generation Diaspora, they have tried to come up with a mixture of both, thereby infusing the creation of fusion foods. Rini Mukhopadhyay, the blogger from *Ms. Mukherjee’s Kitchen* has mentioned in the interview about the creation of a different cuisine. She said, *“I definitely feel I have an edge over others to create and serve my recipes, and to bring an authentic and unique flavor to the local palette here.”*

At interviewing my respondents, they had strong comments on identity construction. They could relate to a separate identity construction with blogging and could also relate to their homelands with the recreation of authentic cuisines. When asked about identity construction through blogging, Sumana Doss Burman, founder of the blog *An Artsy Appetite*, said, *“I could always identify with my homeland and yes, food blogging does give me this amazing sense of satisfaction*

⁷⁴ <https://www.cookwithmanali.com/meetme/>

when I can share recipes and experiences that brought joy to me. I do see that as another dimension to my identity now.”

The blogs have offered a digital space for “reconfiguring identities” by sharing their stories of recipes and story weaved around these recipes. This section attempts to analyze the blogs on the basis of identity construction. Manali Singh from the food blog *Cooking With Manali* replies when asked about identity. She replies with a positive vibe and affirmed that she can relate to many memories of her homeland are related to food. She affirms “*every festival, even occasion is somehow related to food. So memories and recipes go hand in hand*”. Dhrubaa also affirms by saying, “*I share a deep connection with my homeland. This instigates me to cook more Indian dishes and create the magic that is created in my homeland.*”

A blog, especially a food blog is a well defined space with some words about the blogger, the colourful motifs and idioms narrating the events or references to their homeland. The section of ‘About Me’ describes the blogger in a few lines, as well as defining the identity traits of the blogger. The colourful pages of the blog, in a way, describe the nature and identity of the blogger. For example, the blog, *My Friday Food Swings* bears a colourful picture of the dish *Sorshe Diye Chhana*⁷⁵ as her latest post. The name of the dish, itself signifies the regional attachment with the food to the blogger. The dish is sincerely decorated to bring a feel of Bengali nostalgia to the blog and this dish is also accompanied with a short story of procuring the recipe by the blogger. Anshu Bhatnagar in her blog *Eat ‘2’ Live ‘2’ Travel* has designed her blog with a texture that is appealing and it is not very difficult to understand that her blog comprises of showcasing her culinary expertise in both Bengali and Rajasthani cuisine. She has accredited her mother and mother-in-law in most of her posts and is thankful to be exposed to two different

⁷⁵ Ricotta Cheese cooked with Mustard Paste

cultures of the same country. I would like to quote Anshu where she says, *“Looking back at memories, it has always been a pleasure to remember the recipes that were taught by my mother in law and my mother. It is always a pleasure to cook those authentic dishes frequently and present the dishes in my blog. It shows my deep connection with my mothers and the fond memories that I try to recapture in my kitchens when I stay away from home.”* Priya, the blogger for *Cookilicious* also adds by saying, *“I have grown up watching my mother contribute to the kitchen and that has stayed with me. Plus I always look back to my grandma’s way of cooking and miss it.”* There have been references of preparing fusion dishes apart from the authentic dishes in the blog *Guilt Free*, where the blogger Pritha presents a dish *Thai Shrimp Salad with Apples and Brussels Sprouts* where she narrates her weekend getaways to “Puri, Digha, Chandipur, Ghatshila”. She also narrates her culinary expedition at Portland where she was treated with *“some mindblowing Peruvian, Lebanese and Thai food...”* The salad that was prepared by her at home was “nowhere close to authentic” and she recollected the taste by “throwing things together to reach that end.”⁷⁶ Anjali, a second generation migrant differs on the opinion of creating an identity in the Diaspora. She says, *“I identify myself as a health coach and nutritionist through my blog.”* Anjali does not share memories of India as her homeland as she regards the USA as her homeland, but she fondly remembers the Indian dishes cooked by her parents. These instances of preparation of dishes display an elegant outcome of the new identity and how the Diaspora bloggers are comfortable with both local and global identities. Sohini, the blogger for *Bong Appetite* professes her idea when asked about the creation of identity as a blogger. She says, *“Food blogging has allowed me to nurture my Indian sentiments and create an Indian identity while living in the Diaspora”*. While the Diasporic community is separated from their homelands, “those whose journeying and activities build the basis of the new

⁷⁶ <http://guiltfreeblog.com/salad/thai-shrimp-salad-with-apples-and-brussels-sprouts/>

communities need such space- space that is freer and more fluid than that within either the homeland or the social realm of the existing ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ society with which the diasporic community has to cope as it seeks to settle itself in the new land and both conserves and adapts the culture that it carries from the homeland to this new world in which it finds itself”. (Rai and Reeves 2008, 4). Priya, the blogger for *Priya’s Curry Nation* also claims that, *“This blog is a joint venture. Me and my husband enjoy the credits that comes from each reader. Though I have a software background, I chose to cook and share the recipes with the readers across the globe. I look at myself as a successful blogger and I have a number of thoughts on this blog and it’s future.”*

Language also forms a vital trait in enhancing the ethnic position of the blogger in the Diaspora. There are several bloggers who use their own regional languages to formulate their Indian identity in the Diaspora. The bloggers use their mother tongues to name and describe some recipes, as they don’t find any substitute to the authentic names of the dishes. Bloggers like Soma Chowdhury in her blog *Spices and Pisces* has used Indian names of dishes in her blogs. Dishes like *Tomato-Peyaj Posto*, *Lau Tetor Dal* are named in the regional language and the names in which it has been pronounced in India. Sumana in her blog *Artsy Appetite* has made ample usage of her native language in her blog, where most of her dishes are Indian. Sumana affirms, *“The use of Bengali language has played a major part in depicting my culinary skills. The typical use of the authentic terms in my blog brings out the authenticity of the blog and how I connect myself with my homeland. It crafts my identity as an Indian in the USA and defines the uniqueness that I can portray.”* While we speak about language, Soma shares her observation on the relationship between Bangladeshis and Bengalis from India. Since both the communities share the same language, the question of identity comes in the forefront. Soma says, *“I am a*

Bengali from India and my grandparents had to migrate from East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh). Though I have never visited my ancestral place in Bangladesh, I meet a number of Bangladeshi professionals at the Asian grocery stores. We almost speak the same language, though our dialect differs. We engage in conversations quite often which leads from candid talks to issues of communal riots in India and Bangladesh. It is always a delight to talk to them in Bengali. Though we share the same language, our identity remains different, where I am identified as Indian and my friends as Bangladeshis.”

As has been said earlier, food blogs often act as spaces to negotiate their dwindling identities in home and their host country. It also helps the Diaspora to connect and access their cuisines at home in the host country.

4.8.2 Memories of homeland and food

The blogs that I have studied concentrates more on the regional cuisines. Their writing of the recipes in the blogs are mostly an outcome of memories of their homeland; to be more specific from their state of origin. The blogs are commitments to showcase the variety of regional foods within the social context.

As Appadurai (1996, 78) suggests, Diasporic nostalgia as “armchair nostalgia: the migrants’ memory of a loss he or she has never suffered”, generally ignited by a material product. Food blogs are believed to trigger nostalgia from the homeland, recreating culinary nostalgia from the homeland. Susan Leonardi (1989, 340) says that each and every recipe has a particular context or “a reason to be”. A sense of culinary belonging pervades in their blogs. The recipes that are created in their blogs bring back memories of their homeland as they are also menus to be

consumed in the Diaspora. In turn, these recipes transfer the notion of home and food through their stories and histories. Archana, the blogger for *Ministry of Curry* relates her memories of food with her homeland. She says, *“After I moved to the United States in 1997, I was always reminded of my mother’s food and her cooking techniques. I started missing my mother and her food. In no time, I could picture myself more in the kitchen experimenting with the traditional recipes which were taught by my mom.”*

The memories are strong, when the cuisine is regional and always close to their hearts. Rini Mukhopadhyay in her blog, *Ms.Mukherjee’s Kitchen* which she is running on Instagram has never failed to mention the urge to cook and the inspirations that have encouraged her to cook. In an interview taken by me, she had specifically mentioned the memory of her grandmother cooking while she studied and the recipe of the ‘special Sunday Bengali mutton curry’ that she has inherited and it remains her favourite till date. Rini says, *“I prepare a yellow pulao and the special Bengali mutton curry which reminds me of my grandmother every time. I try to recreate it in the way she made it always.”*

The earliest memories of food are always associated with their homeland. Sharing the regional cuisine globally brings out the memories etched in the minds. Food makes them highlight the fact that the earliest memory of food has always been associated with the female components of their households. As has been noted in the blog *My Friday Food Swings* by Somdatta,

“...the ladies, ma (my Mom), kakimas (aunts) showing off their cooking expertise with traditional dishes and also the ones they spent afternoons adapting from various cookbooks and sharing with each other over hour long phonecalls.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ <https://www.myfridayfoodswings.com/about/>

As Sutton (2001) also states about the myriad definitions of food and memory. Food forms a formidable part where it acts as a way to evoke nostalgia and memory. While speaking of nostalgia, (Sunaina Maira in Mannur 2009, 42) defines “critical nostalgia as a more reflexive form of nostalgia attuned to the politics of consumption. To consume culture in all its varied forms or to be nostalgic about cultural artifacts, is as much about imagining an inclusive future as it is about commemorating memories of the past”. Food blogging is a major tool of communication in the 21st century. Considering Levi Strauss’ (1963) theory that communication is one of the tools for retaining culture and identity we can argue that food blogging is a medium of promoting culture and identity.

Pritha Chakraborty, of the blog, *Guilt Free* when asked about her early memories of food talks about her grandmother who was “an excellent cook and probably” her “earliest inspiration behind looking upon food and cooking as a passion”. When interviewed she also said, “*We celebrate food as a family. Every major family event or even the most mundane day is laced with memories of food.*” Bloggers like Prashanthi, the blogger for *Yummily Yours* also says, “*Blogging is a hobby that brings pleasure within me and I like to keep it that way. My love for food motivates me to continue blogging and also while cooking I also feel nostalgic. I am often reminded of the memories that are associated with food and cooking.*”

Some of the other bloggers have written down their earliest memory of food, which are also linked with the ritualistic cooking of food during particular festivals. Aanchal Gupta, the blogger for *Food, Fitness, Beauty and More* has stated in the interview that, “*...memories are always connected with food. During festivals, we try to make, though not always possible what used to be made at home. Holi its always Puri Aloo, Kheer and Thandai, Diwali is always different types of mithais, Karwa Chauth is meethi mathi.*” Similarly, Vidya, the blogger for *Traditionally*

Modern Food also states, “Whenever I cook authentic Indian dishes, the memories of homeland are rekindled.” Holtzman (2006, 364) analyses food “as a cultural construct”, while Lupton (1994, 1996) analyses how the memories of certain food structure out eating habits. Holtzman (2006) also signifies how food forms the central theme in understanding and analyzing memory.

The domain of blogosphere has attempted to analyze their growth defining themselves as narratives of the home and the self. While the main aim of the blogger remains to connect with their homeland and maintains their integrity with the regional cuisines prepared and showcased in their blogs, the other goal also remains to connect globally with the other bloggers and enthusiastic and learning readers of their blogs. A strong sense of border and displacement keeps working in their minds and this extends into the digital world where they can connect with the culture of South Asia or India to be specific and form a part of the blogosphere. Anita, the blogger for *Crave, Cook, Click* also reminisces about her memories of her homeland. Her earliest memories of food urge her to say, “*My earliest memories of food reminds me of my mother cooking in her kitchen. The dishes that she used to create still remains my favourite till date.*”

According to Chen (2021), studies concerned with memory are always “contested, compromised and conflicted”. The identity that is formed is often formed by the “memory’s ability to link the present with the past to re-stage and heal psychological wounds”. The memories of homeland and food often ignite their lost identity which provokes them to recreate the memories of the past. Scholars like Ganguly (1992), Pratt (1992) and the like have stated that, “preoccupations with the gendered politics of decolonization, exile, migration and immigration have given rise to questions about the archive and about the transmission of memory across spatial and generational boundaries”. This has been evident in the contents of the food bloggers where they

have tried to re define their memories of the homeland through blogging which transcends the borders.

In my analysis, I have brought forth the women who had travelled to the USA with their husbands and they have spoken to me on their memories of their homeland and how the culinary idiom connects them with their homeland. While the first generation migrants are in focus, the minority in my study, i.e; the second generation migrants do not find a proper place. Anjali Shah, a second generation migrant and also the founder for the blog *The Picky Eater*, states in the interview that her early memories of food have differed slightly from the others. As she has been born and bred in the US, her memories are formed of “*the recipes my parents made for me when I was a child get recreated in my kitchen all the time and there is a nostalgia associated with them*”. Gaura of the blog, *HopeYou Relate *Indian Mom USA** is reminded of her memories of homeland and when asked she says, “*In my blog, I have always tried to portray a regular day in my life. Creating content on festivals is always special for me. I try to recreate some of the special recipes that used to be created by my mother in India.*”

Vikram Bapat, the blogger for *Breaking Naan* has also elaborated on his memories of food. He said, “*Lot of our recipes is based on stringing together childhood memories, or memories of a time and place of eating a dish. Recreating them captures these memories and takes us back to connect with that time, place and people.*” Soma, the blogger for *Spices and Pisces* have innumerable memories, amongst them the most prominent being, “*On Saturdays, I used to get one piece of chicken after it was sauted in the spices and before my mother added the water to the gravy. That taste sticks to my mind.*” According to Levi Strauss (1963), a culture or a society does not exist without “language and cooking skills’. The culture of a society defines how “possible nutrition is coded into acceptable food”. The concept of raw and cooked food has been

one of the basic definitions of nutrition and how it has been represented in the culture of the society. Therefore, cooking, i.e., transforming the food from raw to cooked by using heat is also considered an act depicting the culture which is the core of the human civilization. The modern human society does not adhere to consume raw foods, and prefers to cook it using heat. Therefore, the memories of cooking, sautéing and serving food are not only an act of providing nourishment to the people but also represent the culture of the society.

Cooking and consumption of the native food becomes a ritual in the Diaspora. This ritual revitalizes the memory of the homeland in the Diaspora. Blogging, in turn, circulates and spreads the notion of rejuvenating the memory of homeland. Blogging is often referred to as “a story designed to reassemble a broken history into a new whole”. (Stewart 1992, 261) The blog acts as an investment in spreading the legacy of homeland to the future generations. The bloggers often preserve these memories through posting them in their blogs that often defines as what Anita Mannur (2009, 147) says, “the social imaginary of the second generation of immigrants.”

A problem that is faced by the cook in the Diaspora is the nostalgia of the home and the need to acculturate in the Diaspora. This leads to innumerable blogs coming up with fusion recipes along with the traditional ones. Almost all the cooks or bloggers have accepted that finding traditional spices and ingredients in America is not at all difficult with a few exceptions like Rini in *Ms.Mukherjee's Kitchen*, where she states that she used to find it difficult to find Indian spices and ingredients in the city in which she lived earlier, for which she had to bring everything from home. However, as she moved to “*bigger cities, situations changed and all Indian ingredients were available*”. Manjula Jain, the blogger for *Manjula's Kitchen* also narrates her story, “*After I got married, I moved to the USA in the 1960's. The situation was not very conducive as it is now. I was incapable of procuring the authentic ingredients required for preparing Indian dishes. I*

had to manage with the few ingredients which were available at that time. Now, when I cook and post Indian vegetarian dishes in my blog, I get nostalgic. Though I have left my country since many years, it is always a delight to cook these dishes and serve it in my blog.”

The respondents have affirmed that while cooking and posting the pictures of food they are often reminded of their mothers and grandmothers. This in turn reminds them of their homeland. Sandhya, the blogger for *Indfused* has also asserted by saying, *“My favourite memories of food remind me of my mother’s fabulous cooking. My greatest inspiration has been my mother.”* Mothers and grandmothers have played a major role in teaching cooking to their daughters and this has been quite evident in the responses of the bloggers. Sanika, the blogger for *Fork N Scissors* also asserts the fact by saying, *“I have learnt cooking from my mother and I always remember her while I cook Indian food.”* As the bloggers have described their journeys after migration, it has also been observed through their responses that food always ignites the memories of homeland. Food not only acts as an instrument to provide nutrition, but also carries a social and cultural aspect. As the Diaspora lives away from home, it is observed that the Diaspora is always reminiscent of their homeland through various social and cultural traits, one among them being food and the bloggers have affirmed to this stating that the preparation and the presentation of Indian food in their blogs helps them to reach out to a larger readership across the world. According to Hirsch and Smith (2002, 6), cultural memory is an act “in the present by which individuals and groups constitute their identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common, and therefore often contested, norms, conventions and practices”. In the context of the Diaspora, we can say feminist studies have provided a different angle to the study of cultural memory. Hirsch and Smith (2002, 6) also states that “What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with

gender”. Therefore, gender along with race shapes identities and “provides a means by which cultural memory is located in a specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic and essentialist categories.”

Every migrant’s cuisine “accommodates globalization as well as nostalgia in uncertain and unique ways.” (Ray, 2004) Locating in the Diaspora also urges the bloggers to create a new kind of cuisine, i.e; fusion food, which is followed by many food bloggers. Fusion cuisine has been an integral part in many blogs and Vikram Bapat, in his blog, *Breaking Naan* has mentioned in his blog about his journey from Pune to many other countries abroad, has taught them to collect recipes from across the world; though their taste for traditional cuisine has remained unaltered.

4.8.3. Festival memories

To twist Claude Levi Strauss’ (1963) proclamation that good food must be good enough to think about it, recipes should also be good enough to read. (Ferguson, 2010) The blogs are often organized with the culinary knowledge from home with acknowledgements to the friends, relatives and families which are often incorporated to mark the standard of authenticity. Religious practices and traditions have always marked a strong belief in the designing and the content of the food blogs. Blogs are always considered spaces for “the invention of tradition.” (Hobsbawm, 1983)

Unlike cookbooks and restaurants, food blogs are not constrained with any kind of commercial consideration, thereby notifying the readers with a sense of nationality and authenticity by focusing on domestic recipes. The memories of festivals; especially the religious festivals play a significant role in the posts of the food blogs. In my analysis of the various blogs, I have come

across many such instances, where festivals and memories of homeland have triggered the bloggers to post a recipe from the moment of celebration. In the blog *Guilt Free*, Pritha, the blogger has narrated many instances of *Durga Puja* and the fond memories of her homeland, which also carries an identity for herself as a Bengali Hindu.

“For such a grand festival like Durga Pujo⁷⁸, the food on the plate should be equally grand. In Bengali households, we almost worship prawns and Pujo undoubtedly means hogging on the best food available in town. We don’t cook at home at all, but many of us venture out to savour Bengali delicacies served by reputed restaurants. Chingri Maachher Malai Curry (prawn dish) is one such undisputed dish that features on top of our lust list. Immersed in a thick rich gravy of coconut (three ways), this prawn dish is sure to blow your mind”⁷⁹. Payal, the blogger for Simple Living Wise Thinking also agrees and asserts by saying, “I am Bengali but I have not been born and bred in Kolkata, whereas I have been brought up in Guwahati. Being a Bengali, Durga Puja brings out the memories of my childhood. During Durga Puja, my mother never used to cook at home, as during festive days we eat outside at restaurants. After migrating to the USA, we usually tend not to cook at homes specially during Durga Puja, whereas during other festivals like Diwali we prepare special sweets and dishes at home.”

Majority of the Bengalis do not cook for the five days of the festival as it is a custom to eat outside in restaurants and also consume the *bhog* that is served to the Goddess and later served to the devotees. The festival time is also considered a leisure time for the women who avoid cooking during these days.

⁷⁸ A ritual in honour of God, to worship

⁷⁹ <http://guiltfreeblog.com/fish-and-seafood/chingri-maachher-malai-curry-prawns-in-a-rich-coconut-gravy/>

Durga Puja forms an indispensable part of the culture of the Bengali community and instances of memories of *Durga Puja* have characterized many such food blogs written primarily by Bengali bloggers. Nostalgia surrounds Somdatta, the blogger for *My Friday Food Swings*, when she is reminiscent of the celebrations being held in great grandeur at her homeland. She says, “It’s a 10 day period of dedicated religious ceremonies and rituals...The festive fervour takes over the city and the hearts of the residents... I have been away from home for the last 12 years... it’s not just me every soul raised on the soil of Bengal pines for those familiar sights and sounds that are so signatory of our being and culture. We Bengalis have some typical foods that we offer to the deity during this festival. And being located along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, our state has a plentiful supply of coconuts. So coconut is a quintessential ingredient of the traditional menu made for the Goddess. Coconut Laddus or Narkel Narus (which my American colleague tasted and said – “oh these are like truffles”) or Coconut Sandesh or Narkel Sandesh (Now this time he said, these are like coconut cookies) has a special significance.”⁸⁰

Festivities have also found a place in Anita Mokashi’s blog, *Crave Cook Click*, where she is brief about her feelings of celebrations and the recipes that are generally prepared during that time of the year. Her blog is filled with many photos from her collection on the auspicious festivals of *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Diwali* and many other Indian festivals and rituals.

“*Ganesh Utsav* is one of my favourite Indian festivals and *Ganpati* is my favourite diety. Being born and brought up in Mumbai, this festival is extremely close to my heart... A *Modak* is a sweet dumpling popular in Western and Southern India.”⁸¹ Similar instances of celebrating *Ganesh Chaturthi* has also been mentioned by Sneha of the blog *Simply Food and More* which is active on Instagram. She says, “*Special recipes and sweets are prepared on Ganesh Chaturthi as*

⁸⁰ <https://www.myfridayfoodswings.com/narkel-sandesh-coconut-sandesh/>

⁸¹ <http://cravecookclick.com/ganesh-chaturthi-celebrations-2016-modak-pedha-churma-ladoo-recipe/>

well as Janmashtami. My blog has slices of the festivities which displays the special recipes prepared for the particular festival.” This shows that people attempt to revive the culture through the medium of blogs. A section of the blog has been devoted to Ramadan Food festival in *Zaiqa* by Mona. Mona, in her blog, has elaborated on the festival of *Eid*, and the feast served for a month once the fast is broken for the day.

“To showcase the typical dishes that are usually prepared by Hyderabadis during the auspicious month of Ramadan, inshallah this event will be announced/held every year on my blog during the whole month of Ramadan, so that you can send me the recipes along with pictures of the dishes that are preparing for Iftaar as well as Suhoor.”⁸²

Meeta, in her blog *Piping Pot Curry*, details about the memories of *Holi*, the festival of colours in one of the sections in her blog. She notes down her childhood memories in India and the wonderful stories during *Holi* and the sweets and savouries served during the festival. She also narrates her list of food served during *Holi*, like *Thandai*, *Gulab Jamun*, *Suji ka Halwa*, *Meethe Chawal* and the like. On the other hand, Aanchal Gupta describes the various kinds of food prepared on festivals and how her food preparation is influenced by religious authenticities in her blog *Food Fitness Beauty and More*. Festivals like *Karwa chauth* and *Diwali* are narrated elaborately in her blog, where she describes the way these festivals are observed. Foods eaten during the auspicious days of festivals, pujas, or *vrats* are elaborately mentioned. The food taken during these days are usually vegetarian and strictly without onion and garlic. Aanchal Gupta meticulously defines this Indian-ness within her through the creation of these posts in her blogs. Anvita and Sonya, the bloggers for *The Belly rules the Mind* reminisces their memories of festivals which are deeply knit with the memories of food. “We hail from typical Punjabi

⁸² <https://zaiqa.net/ramadan-food-festival/>

families, where food is an integral part of the culture. We celebrate festivals like Lohri, Basant Panchami, Baisakhi, Karwa Chauth and the like. Each festival came with the love for the special food that was prepared at home. The Meethe Peeley Chawal (a yellow sweet rice dish), Rajma Chawal (rice and rajma), Chole Bhature reminds me of the rich aroma of spices that originated from my mother's kitchen. Each festival meant special dishes." Festivals have always come handy with good food. Kankana, the blogger for *Playful Cooking* also shares her thoughts when it comes to festivals and food. She says, *"Festivals always ignite the desire to cook and eat some traditional dishes, which were cooked at home. In my culinary space, i.e; my blog, I share my love for food and cook authentic dishes and share it with my readers."*

The festival posts display nostalgia, a longing for home and are expressed in 'the re-envisioning of bygone days as edenic moments'. (Tuzi 1997, 20). Mullai, the blogger for *Spice India Online* says, *'During festivals, we used to prepare a gala feast. I try to re create those dishes after I migrated too'*. The festival memories shared in the blog posts, the dishes prepared during these auspicious days becomes the key to the 'inner domain' of the Diasporic community; which is spread out globally. The multicultural natures of the food blogs also enable them not just to 'reflect culture, history and differences, but also produce them'. (Chambers 1994, 14)

4.8.4. Gendered issues

"I have been raised in south Indian family where I was fed vegetarian food. After I got married to a non-vegetarian person, I started experimenting with the two forms of cuisine. Most of the posts are recipes that I have tried in my kitchen and these recipes are taught by my mother in the traditional way. I am the sole person behind my blog. The photography, cooking, presenting and

writing is done by me.” Manju, the blogger for *Cooking Curries* shares with us when asked about her blog and how females form the major part of writing and reading blogs.

The food blog depict a woman’s life dedicated to food in the kitchen. The images of step-by-step food preparation and the stories surrounding the recipes also seem to project the idea that women spend the maximum hours in the kitchen relishing their job of cooking and later blogging about food. Well, reality speaks a different story altogether, where not all women love to spend their time in the kitchens. “The expectation that cooking should be fulfilling for everyone is insidious, especially for women”. (Matchar 2013, 114). The task of women performing the domestic duties is solely the choices of women who enjoy performing these tasks, which are usually considered feminine. Women’s domestic chores have been considered as equivalent to their husband’s office work by the Supreme Court of India on 6th January, 2021. Women were always pushed to stay back at home and perform household chores. Since domestic work did not earn any remuneration, it did not add to the workload. A homemaker, usually a woman is often observed to be preparing food, taking care of the children and the elderly and the like. “Women on an average spend 16.9% and 2.6% of their day on unpaid domestic services and unpaid caregiving services for household members respectively, while men spend 1.7% and 0.8%”, as said by Justice Ramana.⁸³ With the times changing, the domestic chores are performed by both men and women in some families. In accordance to the discussion on the household work conducted by women, Ray (2004, 124) has structured his arguments by saying, “Historically, those who work- in particular, those who do physical work- are at the bottom of the social order. In contrast, those who do ritual work have greater stature, i.e; the priests, doctors and the like. So it is important to ask whether women’s work in the household is seen as mere physical work or ritual work, work

⁸³<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/value-of-homemakers-work-same-as-hubbys-at-office-sc/articleshow/80125241.cms>

that preserves a community. If the preparation of food is regarded as an act of worship, of ‘the cooked-food sacrifice offered at the domestic fire’ analogous to rituals performed by a priest”, then the perspective of women contributing nothing by performing household work remains a question to be answered. The contemporary thoughts say something else as cooking and household tasks should not just be classified as feminine thoughts, but are considered as tasks which are participatory for both men and women.

Often, the food blogs written by Diasporic women evoke memories and tales of the homeland, displaying gendered identities.

“Women cook with the heart, men cook with the head” says Anshu Bhatnagar on gender issues and domesticity in the kitchen and domestic lives. Some of the respondents for my survey have affirmed about their interest and love to perform the domestic tasks, especially in the kitchens, whether it is in the country or the Diaspora. Antonet of *Anto’s Kitchen* has also stated her love for cooking with occasional help from her husband at grocery shopping and household chores.

On the other hand, most of the respondents have denied the stereotypical ideas of women dominating the kitchens and the household chores. Priya Lakshminarayan of *Cookilicious* has stated that *“the kitchen is no more a female dominated area and man or woman should be able to know the preliminaries of cooking to fend themselves”*. Anita Mokashi of *Crave Cook Click* also asserts the simultaneous role of men and women in the kitchen, where her kitchen also finds her husband as a regular visitor. Dhruvaa Mukherjee of *Not A Curry* points out a poignant characteristic while speaking about the gendered identity and issue in the kitchen forte. She states that *“the kitchen is female dominated when it comes to domestic ones, while commercial kitchens have lower female representation.”* Cooking for many of these bloggers is a passion

which they love to do which has been affirmed by Pritha of *Guilt Free*. She says, “*My husband has zero issues with food and can survive on cornflakes, yogurt and fruits for months on end. In my family, I am way more encouraged to study, learn, work and play. I cook because I love to, but I don’t think I would have been forced to cook if I didn’t.*” Most of the respondents have responded to their eagerness and love for cooking and denied the restricted role of women in the kitchens. Bloggers like Somdatta, Manali, Rini and others also have backed to their responses of denying to the fact of the kitchen being dominated by women and have asserted it that with changing times, the role in the kitchen is simultaneously played both by men and women. Nishtha Gupta again professes the idea of women being good at multi tasking better than men. Men have been pushed out to carry out duties outside the house, pushing women to maintain and see to the household chores. Similarly, Ritu, the blogger for *Albeli Ritu* claims, “*Vlogging is such a venture which has acted as a boon for me. After moving to the USA, like many other women who migrate after getting married, I also tried to search for jobs which could match my profile. Unfortunately, I was not lucky enough and I tried my hands on blogging about my daily life in the USA and it turned out to be the best option for my soul and mind. Most of the blogging network is dominated by women and I feel not getting the opportunity to work has also inspired many like us to venture into blogging.*”

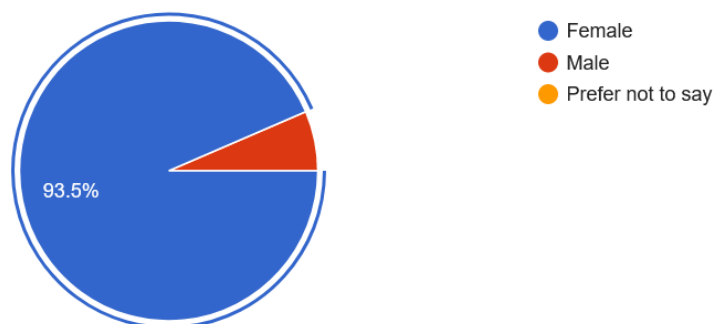


Fig. 20. Source: Image from fieldwork⁸⁴

Talking more about the gendered issue, it has been observed that women who have migrated and formed a part of the Diaspora have taken to blogging (lifestyle, food) as they are not working. They try to find out their own spaces through the digital space of blogging and vent their creativity through food and photography of food, travel and create an identity only for themselves. Migrating to the United States has landed them in a state of joblessness, resulting in blogging and reaching out to people across the globe. Some more bloggers have also stated that women as pioneers in the kitchen is quite an Indian phenomenon and this boundary gets dissolved once the responsibilities of running the house gets equally divided. Soma of *Spices and Pisces* says, “As women are still perceived as the homemaker and driver of the domestic hospitality part, the blogosphere will be dominated by more women. Some women who do not work and wants to have their own identity or creative side explored, blogging is a great way to do that.” Shrividhya, the blogger for *Vidhya’s Home Cooking* also states, “The kitchen is no more a female dominated arena. The scenario is slowly changing and its in our hands to change it. I started teaching my 9 year old son cooking.” Sandhya, the blogger for *Vegetarian Home Style Cooking* also shares her thoughts by saying, “Everyone should know how to cook. Men who come here unmarried learn to cook after they migrate. They need to stay fit to get a medical insurance, which instigates them to cook and eat healthy.”

Vikram of *Breaking Naan*, a male food blogger has been very enthusiastic while talking about gender related issues. He pointed out to the social structure of the society which has played a contributing role in forming the usual pattern of women dominating the kitchens. He shares his perspective of men being rather shy in entering the kitchen “*due to lack of interest or peer*

⁸⁴ In the above figure derived from the fieldwork, it shows that out of a total of 41 respondents, 93.5% form the female population, while the rest 6.5% form the male population among the food bloggers.

pressure of being judged in the kitchen. At the same time, I feel with personal experiences that women seem reluctant in some cases to give up the control in the kitchen although it might be unfair to generalize either of these.” He affirms the blogosphere to be dominated by the women with a wide female readership weaving a thread with which they can relate to. The blogs have strengthened the ties between women across the world with unlimited stories of the past. The gender roles and the social divisions have always framed the Diaspora and their locations, where blogging has helped to reaffirm their situations.

I would like to conclude this chapter stating that, the gendered role of the blogs has been reaffirmed. The use of colourful images of food, the stories hidden behind the preparation of the dishes posted in the blogs has shaped and identified the Diasporic lives in the context of identities, memories and gender. This magnanimous arena of blogosphere has witnessed the formation of a huge community formed digitally across the globe with a maximum number of women writers and women readers, with a few exceptions. The lives in Diaspora are often represented with features of nostalgia, longing for home and a somewhat lost identity. The blogs written by women have tried to bring forth the community together and knit a tale of togetherness through this sphere of blogging, where the bloggers and readers can relate to each other through the posts shared. The blogs, which are a merging of food and Diaspora have captured the digital imagination of the Diaspora and registered it well.

Analysis of cuisines in Diaspora: Gender, Culture and Rituals

What we eat or not eat always forms a part of our identity and culture. There are certain stereotypical features that are followed while cooking and eating. These stereotypes sometimes start to “borrow, re-create and re-consume”. Certain other factors also come into the forefront while deciding and analyzing the contemporary concepts of cuisine. The factors amount up to who is cooking when it is cooked, what gets eaten and what are the norms followed while cooking. There are many reasons and processes which have influenced the mixing of cultures and foodways and their subsequent systems. The major reason stands “as colonialism, followed by many other processes; one such being the process of migration”.

The process of migration came along with the movement of ethnic food moving globally. According to Krishnendu Ray, the word ‘ethnic’ is used to connote “a category of things we don’t know much about, don’t understand much about and yet find it valid to express opinions about.”⁸⁵

Well, this might be implied to the second-generation immigrants, whereas the first-generation immigrants have been found to be nostalgic about their ethnic food and also identifies themselves with the food of their origin. While we are talking about Indian food and its tour of

⁸⁵https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/why-everyone-should-stop-calling-immigrant-food-ethnic/2015/07/20/07927100-266f-11e5-b77f-eb13a215f593_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.663f1229644c

the world, we come across some very pertinent aspects of it. The food in the immigrant experience has some of its stages of evolution; either they are found to be prepared with utmost sincerity at home to make a traditional setup in the Diaspora, or they are mixed and prepared to make it some kind of fusion food, which popularized the restaurant business in the Diaspora. While the proliferating restaurant business is not the main context of study in this analysis, one must never obliterate the function of this business in the genre of culinary studies.

“Immigrant food” (Ray, 2004) is tied to the identity of the Diaspora. It brings with it the exotic flavours from the country of origin and makes one feel nostalgic and bound with memories of home. Some of the oldest memories of home are ignited by the thought of food and the memories associated with it. Similar to what the celebrity chef, Ranveer Brar tweets every week on his weekly posts named, *Maa Ki Baat*,⁸⁶ where he shares his experiences with a mother cooking in the kitchen on every episode; the earliest memories of food always comes up with food cooked in our mother’s kitchens at home. He never fails to mention the undaunted roles of women in the kitchen, be it in the country or in the Diaspora. He also mentions the fact that home food is often taken for granted and the people too, who cook it. It has always been observed and studied about the gender stereotypes of men and women being recognized by the tasks they perform. Women are always believed to be docile and fragile, expected to perform tasks like handling children, cooking and cleaning, whereas men are supposed to fulfill duties like working outside the house, earning and managing the so-called tougher tasks. This stereotype has gone through stages of changes and the present scenario is witnessing shifts in roles of gender in the kitchens, which has been attempted to study in my analysis. The society has been celebrating women, kitchen and food since centuries and women are found to have the indomitable spirits when it comes to

⁸⁶ <https://www.exchange4media.com/industry-briefing-news/chef-ranveer-brar-launches-new-digital-series-maa-ki-baat-96990.html>

household kitchens, whereas men have outgrown and come forward to handling the glamorous side of the kitchen as chefs. Though the number and fame have increased for male chefs, women have not been pushed backwards. They have carved their ways into the world of cuisine outside their kitchens. As has been noted by Vir Sanghvi in one of his articles on Ritu Dalmia, a contemporary celebrated female chef, “This is a woman who does not bother to hide her sexual orientation, who will not compromise on the authenticity of her food, who will open new restaurants in new countries and will do it all without depending on any man”.⁸⁷ You could call Ritu Dalmia’s success a feminist victory. “Or you could just call it a gender-neutral triumph of courage and skill.”⁸⁸

Since centuries, the role of females in the household kitchens have always been predominantly defined and highlighted, whereas women working as chefs in restaurants have been in practice off late. As Vir Sanghvi mentions in his article above the success story of Ritu Dalmia, it is of utmost importance showing how women have created their own “feminist victory” amidst all the prominent male chefs. Women, have indeed, stepped out of the threshold of their households to create an identity of their own and venture into a new world.

A usual scene in the Indian household shows the woman taking care of the house, cleaning, cooking and raising children. After a hard-earned day, the men of the family expect warm dishes at their dining table cooked and served by women. This trend has been continuing since ages, as culturally women are expected to cook and are confined to the role of a homemaker. While the times have changed and women have stepped out of the household to make careers for them and earn, they are still expected to be the sole care giver of the family. With the shift in gender roles

⁸⁷ <https://nrai.org/the-chef-is-a-diva/>

⁸⁸ <http://www.virsanghvi.com/Article-Details.aspx?key=%201496>

in parenting and taking care of the family, Indian women have often faced social stigma. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “on an average day, 51 per cent of women do housework, compared to only 20 per cent of men (cleaning, doing laundry, etc.). On these ‘average days’, women spend about 2.6 hours on household tasks, and men spend about 2 hours (tasks such as mowing the lawn are also included)”. (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Indian food crossed the borders of the continent and landed in America, with the help of migrants who travelled abroad. Madhur Jaffrey, a pioneer in culinary writing, had stated in her first cookbook, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (1973, 4), where she says, “Indian recipes completely adapted to the American kitchen, some easy and simple, others to be mastered with patience and practice”. She held a remarkable place in popularizing Indian cuisine across the globe when she travelled from Delhi to London and finally to New York. It was an age when the cookbooks of Madhur Jaffrey and Tarla Dalal did wonders, serving the tastes of the Indian Diaspora, when only curry and Naan were popular in the West and Google and YouTube did not serve the purpose of finding Indian recipes and how to cook them.

The preparation of food is in itself a magnanimous process and with authentic Indian food cooking in the household, rituals and habits go hand in hand. This part of my thesis would also delve into looking at the influence and impact of rituals on food and eating habits, and whether they are prevalent in the Diaspora too. The rituals followed while eating food are observed worldwide across many cultures and groups, and each tends to differ according to their beliefs. While food politics in India has been universal over the ages, it has been brewing up with the prevailing political system in India and the construction of the caste structure. Food politics are policies dictated by the government to keep food production, consumption, food supply and the

like in order. “Eating as a habit has been twisted and turned to form a new insight into political protest. Gandhiji had made the habit of not eating as a form of political protest. Narendra Modi, the present prime minister of India also observes the art of not eating to help build his image of impressive self-discipline.”⁸⁹

Speaking of rituals of food making and consumption, a fascinating story comes up in mind, when Swapna M Bannerjee in her book, *Men, Women and Domestics* (2004) surveys about the identity formation of the middle-class Bengali household in the 18th and 19th century Bengal; which gets identified with food and the exploitation of the cooks, which originated from Odisha. The middle-class Bengali household did not want to eat food that was cooked by lower caste people as it would lead to caste contamination. Scholars like G.S Ghurye (1932), M.N. Srinivas (1952) and Andre Beteille (1990) and the like have also highlighted on the sociological perspectives of the caste pollution and purity on food and social commensality. With the shortage in the hiring of high caste Brahmins as cooks in the households, Bengal turned on to Odisha to hire cooks. This is an instance proving the hierarchies of the caste system prevalent in India and the gender roles that were visible in the kitchens. The Indian domestic kitchen was always dominated by the women of the household; whereas the cooking done for other households were done by the higher caste men. According to Herman (1998, 161), tracing back to the Indian civilization, when he talks about the Indian mythological figure, *Sita*, and her kitchen amongst the much-debated ruins of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya; he mentions that “the Sita in the Valmiki Ramayana (ca. 2nd century BCE- 2nd century CE) is never in the kitchen, she may be born from the furrow, marry, live in the forest, waste away in an *asoka* garden, walk into fire, retire to an *ashrama*, bear twins, be taken into the earth and so much more- but in the epic itself

⁸⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/indias-food-politics-and-how-it-was-capable-of-caste-promotion/articleshow/66394245.cms>

she does not set foot in the kitchen and seldom lifts a finger to prepare food.” Herman (1998) also states that, it has been found that King Dasharath had gifted Sita a space for her kitchen after her marriage. In some other books, like the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* (24.1-8), Sita’s kitchen is located to trace the presence of Sita in “a divine kitchen shrine that not only is always full of food and always open but also has the power to purify the worshipper and to bestow prosperity and food”. Thus, it might be concluded that the site of *Sita’s* kitchen is something that has been deliberately formed to give a feminine shape to the concept of kitchen and food.

Whereas the domestic kitchens are supposed to be controlled by the women of the household, the men have always been given a choice when it comes to cooking. Be it the Brahmin cooks who used to cook for other households or the male celebrity chefs, it is their sole choice to adopt and learn the methods of cooking and implement them in their culinary expertise. Though the Brahmin cooks were chosen by the households to cook to maintain the caste consistency, the chefs had a choice to opt for an occupation in gastronomy.

5.1. Case Studies

I will be presenting case studies of 5 women whom I have interviewed for my thesis to examine their foodways and foodscapes after being transnational migrants.

5.1.1. Case Study 1: Avinanda Bhattacharya

Avinanda was located in Chennai, India, working as a language specialist, before she moved to the US with her husband, Aritra, after she got married. Her husband is a tax Consultant, residing presently in Philadelphia (USA) for the past 2 years. Her husband has been residing in the USA as NRI for about 6 years. He had shifted to the USA for work, and after Avinanda got married,

she also had to shift along with her husband. Avinanda was not willing to resign from her job in India, but the eagerness to stay with her husband after their marriage, caused her to do so. She returns to Kolkata, India once in a year and has now embraced taking care of the household as her main job. She also works as a part-time volunteer for social causes, but taking care of the household remains her fundamental job. The language spoken in her family is Bengali and the diet followed in the household is primarily non vegetarian, except for a few days of festival like *Durga Ashtami*, *Janmashtami*, *Saraswati Puja* when the family follows a vegetarian diet. The couple also follows a vegetarian diet on Thursdays, but that is not mandatory but subject to convenience. This diet is followed only in the home and any meal outside the house is not necessarily vegetarian. She says that she follows almost the same menu during breakfast, lunch and dinner that she used to follow in India, with a few innovations to the dishes by adding American experimental cuisines like Tacos with guacamole, Chicken wraps or stir-fried noodles. She also says that some of her eating habits have also gone for a change with replacing the heavy Indian lunch with salad, grilled chicken or fish as it is considered a healthier option, adding a variety of vegetables like asparagus, Brussels sprouts, zucchinis and greens like lettuce, kale, collard greens, broccoli and the like. The other additions in her kitchen are fillet fish instead of whole fish which is readily available. She also states about her restrictions on eating that she does not have beef or pork owing to her Hindu faith. When asked about the availability of the Indian ingredients, she thanks the ever-growing Indian population in the USA for which the Indian ingredients are readily available in the Indian groceries. A lot of Pakistani and Bangladeshi stores also supply Indian groceries, meat and fish. She also finds vegetables in some of the popular stores that are more freshly available than those available in India. Some Indian grocery stores are also dedicated to some particular regions of India, like Gujrati sections have

khakras and dhoklas and South Indian sections have *dosa* and *idli* batter. She says in great disappointment that being a Bengali, she does not find *neem* leaves, which forms a formidable part in her lunch. She also enumerates the differences in Indian cooking and American cooking. She says that Indian food is cooked with a number of spices, whereas American food is bland in comparison. She observes that either American food is healthy stuff like a bowl of salad, which provides the basic and daily nutrients necessary for a healthy diet or it is absolute junk food which consists of burgers, fries and coke. She craves for Indian dishes which make her feel nostalgic about her home and preparing them often provides a mental consolation for her. She craves for Indian food during the religious festivals celebrated during the various parts of the year. Finally, Avinanda, contradicts from the views of the others who profess the idea that gender roles have shifted in the kitchen in the Diaspora. She is the sole cook in her kitchen, where she uses some modern techniques to lessen her job and save some time.

The case study of Avinanda, who follows non vegetarian diet presented above, provides a glimpse into one of the regional cuisines that are practiced in India. As a Bengali, she cooks Bengali dishes at her home with some newness in her diet by borrowing some chunks of American cuisine. We can very well name her kind of cuisine as fusion food, where there is a mixture of Indian and American ingredients.

5.1.2. Case Study 2: Smita Trevino

Smita migrated to the USA 13 years ago for higher studies and later got married to an American. Her family comprises of her husband, and her sons. She hails from Guwahati, Assam, India and she speaks both English and Hindi in her home. Smita works in a school that provides Hispanic food for lunch. She celebrates festivals from both the cultures like Durga Puja, Christmas and Thanksgiving to teach their children the significance of both the cultures and the meanings

behind the traditions. As mentioned earlier, she works in a school and the gender roles of maintaining the household are played by both the husband and the wife. Since the couple is working, it requires the time and effort of the couple to spare some time for their household chores like cooking and taking care of the children. Though the husband spares time to help her in maintaining other household chores, cooking is done by Smita. In spite of consuming the daily Indian dishes at breakfast, lunch and dinner that used to be cooked at her home in India, she cooks bacon egg with croissants on weekends and cereals are consumed on weekdays. The dinner at home is also a fusion cuisine, where Smita takes up every day as a cultural day for her dinner. She cooks pasta, Indian rice or bread with non vegetarian curries, Asian and American dishes. She also mentions about the changes in her diet after residing as a migrant in the USA. Her food intake has American and Mexican food in a larger proportion, and Indian food is consumed less, though she tries to cook Indian food twice a week within a tough schedule. Smita says that the Indian ingredients are quite readily available in the Indian groceries, whereas she has also failed in finding some of the authentic spices like *hing*⁹⁰ and *meetha atar*⁹¹, a basic ingredient for making biriyani, in the Indian groceries. She also states about the restrictions of eating in her house, where the family does not have beef and processed cheese and meat due to certain medical conditions. According to Smita, cooking and maintaining the household chores are shared by all the female family members in India when there is a large family. Whereas, in the USA, the tradition of sharing the chores is obsolete. She says she and her husband work full time along with doing everything, “starting from laundry to cleaning bathrooms”. She finds cooking here time-consuming as there is no one to share her workload. Therefore, she uses the available modern techniques to cook the meals faster. When asked about the differences in

⁹⁰ asafoetida

⁹¹ A scent which makes royal dishes tasty and delicious

cooking food in India and America, she states that she finds the vegetables, meat and fish fresher in India rather than in America. She also states that frozen vegetables, meat and fish are widely available and used in the households as it becomes more convenient to use and store. When asked about food playing a role in articulating identity in the Diaspora, Smita says she becomes nostalgic on thinking about food cooked by her mother, which cannot be re-created in her kitchen. Initially, when she had migrated to USA from India, cooking food played a role as she could not cook and she felt nostalgic at not being able to cook Indian food. Her bonds with the homeland grew stronger through food, but after living in the USA for more than a decade, Smita has adjusted herself in eating food which is readily available. Food to her is just a source of survival. There is no shift in gender roles in her kitchen.

The case study of Smita provides a glimpse into a family which prepares fusion food and can be announced as a family with mixed cultural traditions, with an Indian wife and an American husband.

5.1.3. Case Study 3: Annapurna Reeve

Annapurna had migrated to the USA for pursuing higher studies at Pittsburg State University. She works as a marketing specialist and is married to Zach, who works as a software programmer. The couple has been married since 2019 and lives in South Dakota. Annapurna hails from Assam, India and it's been 1.5 years since she has migrated to the USA. The purpose of her migration has been different from the other dependant women, who have migrated after marriage. The couple does not practice any specific religion in their home and none of their dietary habits involves any ritualistic practices associated with religion. Zach being an agnostic does not follow any specific religious ceremonies other than the couple celebrating Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, Easter and Christmas. These celebrations are performed with the

cooking of traditional dishes like turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, sweet corn, beef stew, pies on Thanksgiving, lasagna, mac and cheese pie, Easter eggs and chicken casserole, on Easter and cakes, cookies, hot cocoa and pheasant casseroles on Christmas. Annapurna has drifted away from consuming traditional Indian dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner after migration. She has adopted consuming beef more frequently, more soda than she used to, pancakes and waffles for breakfast. In spite of being an American, her husband is more interested in consuming Indian dishes like *samosas*⁹². Meat consumption is frequent and is taken almost thrice a day. The breakfast for Annapurna mainly consists of bread, eggs, cream, cheese, cereal, casseroles, pancakes and waffles; lunch comprises of grilled cheese, rice and curry, fried veggies and meat; dinner mainly consists of Indian food like *roti*⁹³, chicken curry, chicken stew and veggies, butter chicken and *naan*⁹⁴. She misses the special lemon and ghost peppers from Assam which is not found anywhere in the USA. Since she lives in South Dakota, she has to drive a couple of hours every month to get all the traditional spices, so she has switched to ordering spices online. The diet in their family does not have any Indian influence as such, as she has adopted the American cuisine wholeheartedly. Surprisingly, Annapurna also says that she has never identified her identity with ethnic food. In India, she enjoyed Naga cuisine though she never belonged to Nagaland. She also observes that her husband being a non-Indian enjoys food from varied regions and countries. He craves for more exposure to food and assimilation in terms of culture. He also enjoys butter chicken and *naan*.

It has been observed in the case study of Annapurna, that she loves to adopt other varieties of cuisine, rather than sticking to Indian cuisine. I felt her kitchen is more of a creative space, where

⁹² Samosa is a small triangular pastry case containing spiced vegetables or meat and served fried.

⁹³ A flat round Indian bread

⁹⁴ An oven baked flat Indian bread

there is an assortment of variety of dishes from India and America, and also an array of fusion dishes. Finally, Annapurna disagrees with the fact that the kitchen is always the women's arena. In her family, the kitchen is used by both her and her husband, where both get a chance to showcase their culinary expertise. She expresses the idea that the kitchen is the women's domain is no longer valid, as modern households have both working husbands and wives and both are expected to cook and take care of their families.

5.1.4. Case 4: Nayan Mahadik

Nayan has migrated to the USA 5 years ago and lives in Chicago, Illinois with her husband. She hails from Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, India. She follows a vegetarian diet while her husband follows a non-vegetarian diet. She follows similar cooking habits as is prevalent in the usual Indian Diasporic kitchens, where she is the cook in her kitchen and the kitchen also follows some very traditional and regular Indian practices used in cooking and preparing food. She mentions that there are no changes in her diet plan, as she consumes almost the same things that she used to consume when in India. She prepares *poha*⁹⁵, *idli*, *upma*⁹⁶ as her breakfast; *Dal*, rice, vegetables and *chapatti* for lunch and the same for dinner. She also mentions diversity in her husband's diet as he is a non-vegetarian by choice. He consumes non vegetarian dishes only when he is outside the home and no non vegetarian dishes are cooked inside the house. Since they follow strict vegetarian diet, there is no option of consuming any meat, while milk products are consumed in abundance. Nayan says that she has stuck on to cooking and eating traditional dishes as she finds comfort in eating the Indian dishes, rather than opting for some other cuisines like American or Mexican. When asked about any restrictions on eating, Nayan replies with glee about the less consumption of sweets due to medical reasons. While the other respondents have

⁹⁵ Flattened rice that is cooked with onions, spices and herbs.

⁹⁶ Made with semolina in south India

agreed to the fact that Indian ingredients are readily available in the American cities, Nayan opposes to the fact and argues that she finds difficulty in finding vegetables like brinjal, okra, cluster beans, spinach, ridge gourd. The difference that she finds in the local cuisine and the traditional Indian cuisine is that the Indian cuisine is spicy and it makes her nostalgic and strengthens her identity with her roots. She uses modern and traditional ways to cook and also sticks on to the traditional rituals that are observed in India while cooking.

Finally, I observe Nayan as a traditional first-generation migrant who follows a strict vegetarian diet and sticks on to the traditional ways and methods followed in India. She is the one who cooks in the family, without taking help from the others in the family. One of the many reasons she cooks and practices Indian food and values in her home, respectively; is she wants to inculcate the Indian values in her children who have migrated along with them. She also professes the idea that women are the queens of the kitchen and this form remains unchanged in her kitchen.

5.1.5. Case 5: Sailaja Kotra- Turner

Sailaja, from Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India, migrated to the USA for higher studies and has been residing in the United States for 21 years. Presently, she lives in Dallas. She is a vegetarian but does not follow any strict religious rules in her home. Her kitchen includes an array of dishes which comes from the whole world. She is presently married to an American and is the mother of two children. Her husband follows a non vegetarian diet and does not follow any strict religious pathways. She speaks in English and Telugu within the domains of their household. She speaks in Telugu with her children as she wants her children to get acquainted with their ethnic culture, but to her disappointment, her children would be considered as second-generation migrants who are unwilling to adopt any aspect of Indian-ness. Sailaja mentions about

her cooking habits that have changed after migrating to the USA. She cooks Indian food once or twice a week, but that is also restricted to her work schedule. She follows Hindu festivals and local holidays and these involve some very significant food rituals that she follows. She cooks special vegetarian food on festival days like *Pongal*, *Ugadi*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, without onion and garlic as they are considered stimulants according to Hindu rituals and customs. She also celebrates Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and traditional food is cooked which is specifically vegetarian. She has also deviated from cooking traditional Indian dishes to including Mexican, Italian and Chinese in her dinner menu, whereas the breakfast menu includes traditional South Indian dishes accompanied by eggs. She also mentions about not depending on rice as being the staple food in the diet. When asked about the availability of Indian ingredients in the Indian groceries, she affirms about getting almost everything, leaving out *kantola*⁹⁷, green eggplant, raw jackfruit and good tamarind which are not readily available. The only difference that Sailaja finds in the dietary habits among the Americans is that rice is not the staple food for the Americans, whereas anyone can eat anything that they want to. As a working woman, Sailaja still uses the traditional ways fused with modern ways to cook food. Tracing her roots from the southern part of India, she says that Indian food has become comfort food for her, where she cooks curd rice sometimes to soothe her senses. There is emotional wellness associated with Indian food.

She has gained momentum in acquiring and adopting the American dietary rules and practices. She has observed that there are men who can cook, but according to her men are ‘packets of chauvinism’. As bachelors, the men are bound to cook and perform certain household activities, but after marriage, it is the woman in the family who enters the kitchen and rules it. She also

⁹⁷ Spiny gourd

says, *“It’s an expectation that women handle the home, whether we are working or not. So, we do”*.

5.2. Food after Migration

With the process of migration, came along the evolution of the Indian cuisine. Cooking is a process where “culture meets nature”. It is through cooking and food consumption that one identifies oneself with the deep-rooted culture, norms and traditions. The process of eating involves a wide array of steps which includes planning, preparing, cooking and some significant skills which are relevant to the dishes that are cooked. With the process of migration, there comes a series of changes in the life of the migrant. The changes in their lives also include a change in the gastronomical system of the migrant, which, again, depends on a number of factors. Each society, across the world, has a specific culinary system of their own, which is important in their own ways. The need to have a specific cuisine is not just because other people have their own cuisines, it also bears a historical and cultural significance to their societies. When people migrate across borders, they try to retain their own identities through a number of factors, one of which, being food. Globalization, which comes along with the migration, leads to a “paradoxically persistent questioning of identity among migrant and natives alike”. Thus the practices of food maintained by the Diaspora, after migration, often bridges the gap between the home and the adopted state, “thereby insinuating themselves into conceptions of home and abroad, this place and that other one, private and public.”

Commencing from the indentured labourers; which can be considered as the first instances of moving out of home (both voluntarily and involuntarily); they developed their own cuisines with

the available ingredients⁹⁸. They concocted dishes which saved time and were equally nutritious. Thereafter, comes the history of migration and how it has played an inevitable part in the modification of the ethnic cuisines in the world across. Prior to the indentured labourers migrating across the borders of India and concocting their own dishes, Indian spices were traded all over the world by land and sea routes.

“Great birds, they say, bring the sticks, which we Greeks call cinnamon and carry them up into the air to make nests. The Arabians, to get the cinnamon, use the following artifice. They cut all the oxen and beasts of burden that die in their land into large pieces and place them near the nests: then they withdraw to a distance, and the old birds, swooping down, seize the pieces of meat and fly with them upto their nests; which not being able to support the weight; break off and fall to the ground. Hereupon, the Arabians return and collect the cinnamon, which is afterwards carried from Arabia and other countries”. (Parry 1953, 38)

Similar to the tale mentioned above, Indian food has its own history of travelling along the world. The modern Indian food, which is consumed in contemporary India, is again, a mixture of spices and ingredients which is indigenous to India with other crops and spices which had travelled to India from various other countries. Massive migration was observed only due to the indentured labour system, which was introduced by the British Raj. “With the South Asian Diaspora amounting to almost 30 million people, they have developed their own cuisines after migration”. These dishes are distinctive in their way as it is very well rooted with the traditions followed in the country and they also prepare fusion dishes with available local ingredients and local influences. Brown (2006) asserts that the Indians migrated to the Caribbean, Jamaica,

⁹⁸ <https://www.splendidthable.org/story/an-intimate-conversation-with-madhur-jaffrey-icon-of-indian-cooking>

Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Malaysia and Singapore, as indentured labourers and later as agricultural labourers to Canada, Australia and North America and later on as skilled professionals to North America, Canada, Gulf and the Middle East. There were many women who had migrated to Britain as servants and midwives serving the British who had incorporated Indian dishes in the British households. The most prominent Indian food item that found prominence in Britain was *curry*. The British had invented the term *curry* to define the stews and soups that they had consumed in India. While the British had invented and incorporated Indian dishes according to their own will, the Indians in North America also developed and retained their own culinary practices in the Diaspora.

While we are tracing the ethnic food and foodways in the Diaspora, Pollock (2009) states that “tracing transnational influences through foodscapes enables us to highlight the cultural continuities and innovations, choices that communities make to enhance their identity”. Food, in the Diaspora, tends to carve the identity of the Diaspora and it also helps to understand the historical and social background and the changes in the same. While we are talking about the food in the Diaspora, it is also important to note the features that one comes across while studying about the foodways in the Diaspora. As the title of the chapter states, the study of the culinary practice involves the study of who prepares the food and how I have tried to elaborate on the concepts of rituals in eating and the gender roles played in the kitchens. Generally, migrants carry with them a rich cultural heritage and also provide space for integration into the new formed society.

The food in the Diaspora has been the themes of study, where scholars have tried to present various factors relevant to the food in the Diaspora. The specific practice and art of cooking,

preparing the food acts as an important way to know the world and its culture through food. Holtzman (2006, 43) describes, "...the longing evoked in diasporic individuals by the smells and tastes of a lost homeland, providing a temporary return to a time when their lives are fragmented". The food from one's homeland evokes ethnic identity, preserving cultural traditions and aggravating homesickness to fulfill nutritional and psychological needs. With the migration, food brings along "bicultural eating patterns" infusing traditional dishes with the local dishes, as opposed to simply adopting the diets of the host country. Therefore, the ethnic diets are reinvented with a new trend maintaining the cultural identity of the migrants. Keeping the immigrant food in mind, I would like to concentrate on two particular aspects of the migrant food. The first one is the role of rituals and how they affect the food in the Diaspora, and whether they are maintained with the zeal and promptness that is maintained in the homeland. The second aspect is the interplay of gender roles that are played in the kitchens of the Diaspora. Below is given the analysis that I have drawn out from questioning various respondents.

5.3. Rituals in eating

Rituals and practices have been an effective and influential factor in the prevailing customary dietary habits in a race or a society. India, a country with the diverse and varied populace and culture has been an observer of customs and rituals in consumption of food, though it varies within cultures and religions. One of the prevalent factors that affect food preparation and consumption is the caste system, prevalent prominently among the Hindus. Variations in preparation and consumption exist and these are "affiliated to religious affiliations". As Srinivas (1980) said, while high caste Hindus are usually vegetarians, with a ban on not eating food cooked by lower caste people; whereas Christians, Muslims and Dalits are followers of strict non

vegetarianism diet; with their own exceptions and restrictions imposed by religious strictness. Whereas there are a sizeable number of Dalits who are vegetarians nowadays. The contemporary scene in India is noticed with a slight shift from the earlier ideologies upheld by society. In even earlier India, as Appadurai (1981, 495) suggested, food restrictions also signalled “sect affiliation, life-cycle stages, gender distinctions, and aspirations towards higher status.”

Indians have been choosy of their cuisine and this behaviour in eating has been reproduced as a result of a number of additions and subtractions in the diet. As Sanghvi (2004, 77) notes in one of his books, “So if you are eating Western food, then yes, I think you are missing something if you don’t order wine. If, on the other hand, you are eating *dal-chawal*⁹⁹, I’m not convinced that a bottle of vintage Chateau Margaux will do much for the taste of your meal.”

Eating is a symbolic phenomenon and every culture is attached to its own set of rituals revolving around their daily dietary habits. The rituals are spread across various religions, cultures and sects of people across the world. Be it the Muslims, Jews or Catholics who follow dietary rules according to the holy days in their calendars, or the Japanese who have an authentic tea ceremony that forms an integral part of their culture. The Chinese follow special rituals while they worship and celebrate the Hungry Ghost festival and is followed across countries which follow Buddhism. Modern anthropology stresses on the fact that “food is a marker of social boundaries”. The use of food in rituals is very obvious in almost all sects, religion and fragments of the society. A special food on a special occasion marks the authenticity of the cultural background of the clan in the society.

⁹⁹ Rice and lentils

Rituals can be defined as “an emotionally significant practice one undertakes routinely”, as said by William Doherty (1999). The society is constructed by human beings who are prone to divisions and classifications; which is based on some of the practices weaved into the fabric of civilization. These practices have come into formation, with the sacred and religious spheres surrounding the human civilization. According to Genep (1960, 3), “Semicivilized peoples acts are enveloped in ceremonies, since to the semicivilized mind no act is entirely free of the sacred”. Genep (1960) also says that in these cases every act and gesture of the society is guided on the rules of sacred and the profane to guard itself from harm. A human being’s life has been divided into his birth, puberty, marriage, death and these ceremonies signify the transgressing or passing of the man from one stage of life to the other.

These rituals which mark the transgression have been further classified into many categories. According to Van Genep (1960), rites can be positive or negative. The positive rights are “the equivalents of positive volitions”, whereas negative rites are commandments which direct us “not to do” and “not to act”. To enhance the negative rights, I would like to bring in an example of a negative rite where a pregnant woman is restricted from eating mulberries of the fear that her child might be disfigured. (1960, 9)

Rituals of eating vary across country, culture and group or sects of people in the society. When we discuss about the rites involved in eating, every culture follow a list of do’s and don’t’s; which are based on religious rites and rituals prevalent in the culture. From offering sweets to the God of Ghosts in countries which practice Buddhism, to preparing *laddus*¹⁰⁰ and offering to the Gods on Diwali, specifically practiced by Hindus; food rituals follow some strict religious reasons and trends.

¹⁰⁰ An Indian sweet made from a mixture of flour, sugar shaped into a ball.

The rites followed while savouring meals are based on strict religious structures of the society. A child in India is offered rice on his/her naming ceremony. This ritual of feeding the child with rice is a sign of prosperity and preparation of the child to traverse into the next stage of his/her life; which is a transition from feeding milk to feeding solid food. Rituals of sacrificing animals and offering to the Gods are also another rite which is practiced in Indian Hindu temples, which follow the footsteps of *Shaivism*¹⁰¹. While we discuss about India, Indian festivals are often characterized with exchanging gifts, exchange of food items, eating, drinking, and sacrificing of animals and the like

Each ceremony terminates with some “rites of incorporation”, (Gennep 1960, 29) where a meal is shared by all which is a common trait. These meals vary across cultures, states, countries and religion. While a wedding ceremony is adorned with a multitude of dishes served for the guests; “a death ceremony is ornate with certain rites and rituals followed by offering food to the departed soul. The rites of eating and drinking are often considered as a rite of incorporation. A funeral is also incomplete without a meal shared at the funeral events. The funeral meal serves the purpose of uniting all the surviving members in the family and also with the deceased, thereby creating a chain of events that has been disrupted with the death that took place in the family”. According to Gennep (1960) some tribes or societies or clans have the tradition of convocation by a cry or a drum that adds more appeal to the meal served which characteristics the serving of the meal as a ritual.

These trends often tend to disintegrate with the process of migration. With the migration and the formation of the imagined community in the Diaspora, the rites and rituals tend to disintegrate and evolve into newer trends in culinary culture. Practices involving food forms a daily parcel of

¹⁰¹ One of the major Hindu traditions that worships the Hindu god, Shiva

life which contributes to forming a national identity and also to the formulation of the concept of 'home'. While the first generation migrants tend to stick on to the practices and rituals followed during consumption and preparation of food, the younger generations tend to move away from the traditional rites and adapt to the food that is convenient to make them identify as the residents of the Diaspora (Leonard, 1992). A migrant feels the sense of otherness in the Diaspora and is often identified with the cultural traits of the respective community. As said by Avinanda, one of the respondents, *"migration has made us flexible... We try to stick on to our traditional rites and follow some rules and rituals that we used to follow back in India. Yes migration has changed our dietary habits, but we try not to eat beef."* The migrants create a sense of identity with the food they eat after migration. These issues are often denoted as cultural abbreviations evoking the love and longing for the nation left behind.

While speaking about rituals, Indian rituals and rites that are related to food are more or less attached to the religiosity. The rites and rituals followed in the Indian households during eating or preparing food is more or less related to the religious practices followed in Indian households. Indians in the United States are observed to be more religious than the ones who stay back in the country. The Diaspora tends to sincerely follow the food rites and rituals to identify their self with the nationality. *"I follow all the rituals that I used to follow back in India. Eating vegetarian meal once or twice a week was a compulsory thing in my family, while after migration, this trait hasn't changed at all. It is an age old custom in south India, to take a bath before entering the kitchen and since I am from the southern part of India, I still maintain the trait of taking a bath early in the morning before entering the kitchen"*, says Pushpa, a resident of the USA since 10 years. *"The observation of karwa chauth, and a number of vrats (fasting) is still prevalent in my home. During certain festivals, it is customary for our family to follow the age old traditions*

followed in India. For days when I am fasting, I make it sure to prepare aloo pakore, mirchi ke pakore, pithi ki pothli and certain vegetarian dishes like paneer butter masala without onion and garlic. Preparation of these traditional Indian dishes attaches me more to our age old beliefs and traditions and it helps me to identify myself as an Indian,” says Anita, one of the respondents.

Death and birth also calls for rituals connected to food. As Kamalika, another respondent, shares her experience with her dietary rituals and habits, she says, *“I was on a veg diet for 5 days for my grandma’s last ritual which we organized in a Hindu temple in Houston, USA”*. With Kamalika sharing her experience of observing rituals during the last rites of her grandmother, Shatabdi, one of the respondents, shares with us the dietary rituals observed during the rice eating ceremony of her daughter, Cynthia. She shares, *“It is a custom among the Bengali Hindus to feed the new born baby with the solid food (generally rice), on her seventh month. While the rice eating ceremony is observed on the fourth or sixth month for a baby boy, the fifth or seventh month is considered auspicious for a baby girl. While we observed the rituals for her rice eating ceremony, we went and observed it in a Hindu temple near Sunnyvale, California. My mother in law had reached California from India and she made sure all the rituals were observed to the smallest detail.”* Most of the Indian communities observe the naming ceremony of the new born babies and observe the rice eating ceremony. This ceremony marks the inception of eating solid food for the new born. This ritual is generally observed in the temples or at the homes. It starts with a *puja* and the baby is offered the *Prasad*¹⁰² which is generally rice. Later an Indian food platter is served to the baby who is fed by the baby’s maternal uncle or grandfather. This marks the transition in the dietary habits of the baby.

¹⁰² A devotional offering made to God, which is later distributed among the devotees.

The customs which are retained by the Indians in the Diaspora often maintain their own ethnicity. Be it the rice eating ceremony for the babies or following vegetarian diet on somebody's death. As women perform *vrats*¹⁰³ and conduct *pujas* at their homes, fasting and following vegetarian diet completes the ceremony. At the death of someone, the family members of the deceased observe mourning for 13 days and try to abstain delicious food items including non vegetarian items. At the completion of the *shraddhh*¹⁰⁴ ceremony on the 13th day, the family members perform *puja* with the breaking of their mourning and return back to their normal vegetarian diets. It has, often, been observed that Indians cook and serve *kheer* on auspicious occasions. K.T. Acharya (1994) says, *kheer* or *payas* or *payasam* is a very popular sweet dish in ancient India. It is often served as staple in Hindu temples and prepared on auspicious occasions and it is still in practice. While some have tried to maintain the ritualistic practices after migration, many have shifted from following the traditional practices and have opted for easier practices and methods of cuisine. They have tried to adapt some of the American food practices and mix and mingle with it. *"I think my food habits have changed after migration. Having a spouse from a different culture, American food being easy to cook, and being diagnosed as pre-diabetic, I have shifted to consuming American food more than Indian food"*, says Annapurna, who is one of the respondent. She also observed *"...karwachauth and prepared poori, chole and kheer. We also do Turkey and Pie for Thanksgiving, ribs and brisket for Christmas eve etc."* While Ritika and her husband enjoy American sandwiches and junk food, she misses her Bengali sweets and desserts which are unavailable in Houston.

With the changing patterns of the ritualistic practices observed in the Diaspora is brought into notice, one of my respondents, have also brought it to notice that *"...most Indian festivals are*

¹⁰³ fast

¹⁰⁴ Funeral ceremony

associated with elaborate traditional food. Here most festivals come on weekdays. Kids are at school and we are at work. It takes away the festive feeling of the festival. Many a times a specific ingredient/ vegetable needs to be prepared over the festival and it is unavailable over here. By the time we return from work, the feeling and the excitement of the festival is gone. We just make do by visiting the temple and meeting with friends to remember the festival,” shares Kshama, a respondent.

Most of the respondents have claimed to be observing all the practices that they used to observe in their homelands. One of the eminent Indian festivals, Diwali is celebrated with equal grandeur and pomp among the Indian communities living in the USA. Aarti says, *“We celebrate Diwali with grandeur in our homes. As we don’t get enough time to go to the temples, we light diyas, prepare sweets and vegetarian food items. We also worship Goddess Lakshmi and Ganesh in our homes and serve kheer as Prasad. Later the offerings or the Prasad is consumed by us and distributed among our Indian friends”*. *“During Holi, we prepare gujiyas (a sweet dish) at our homes and perform pujas,”* says Kshama. Almost all the festivals come with the performance of *pujas* which is mainly conducted by the women in the family as *“it is generally a small family affair”*, says Rai, a respondent. She also says, *“I am a very religious person. I almost conduct all the pujas and perform the rituals like chanting mantras on Saraswati Puja, Shivratri, Diwali and perform these pujas at home. We get almost all the ingredients required for the puja at the Indian stores in New York. Later we offer puri, dum aloo, khichdi, kheer, fruits and sweets to the Gods and Goddesses. The Prasad is later consumed by us. On other grand occasions like Durga Puja or Navratri, we usually go to the Hindu temples where Indian communities gather together to celebrate the festival. Bhog or Prasad is served to whoever goes for a visit.”* The offering of food needs to be offered to the Gods by chanting some particular mantras, and that depends on

which puja is performed as each *puja* has its own mantras and rituals. As Garima, a respondent asserts, “*we often light diyas and incense sticks while we perform the pujas and chant mantras while offering flowers and food to the Gods*”. All the festivals and gatherings end with a grand and collective meal. Kamalika elaborates by saying, “*We celebrate Durga Puja within a period between September and October. Diwali is celebrated during the period of mid-October to mid-November. When the festivals are celebrated in Hindu temples, male priests are summoned to perform the rituals. Apart from Indian Bengalis, a lot of Bangladeshi Hindus are also observed to be attending Durga Puja and Diwali along with us. Men, usually, bear the responsibility of decorating the mandaps¹⁰⁵ and are often observed to be kneading the dough in large quantities for *luchi*¹⁰⁶ and *paratha* which are different types of bread. The women in the group act as helpers to the priest who performs the pujas.*” Ritoja, one of the respondents, also adds by saying, “*We generally order food for those 6 days of Durga Puja from the various renowned catering services*”. Meals consumed during the 6 days of *Durga Puja* are mainly vegetarian, but the menu changes from day to day. Mona, the only Muslim respondent also says, “*...men are burdened with the responsibility of procuring grocery items and they are also the one who choose the best animals for sacrifice. We, women are responsible for cooking and the kitchen is the domain of the women. Decorating and cleaning the homes are an integral part of Eid and the women do the needful. In India, the men are served first while serving the meal, whereas the kids are the ones who are served first while we stay in the US.*” Time is another important factor while preparing and serving meals. It is an age old practice among the Hindu women to take a bath and enter the kitchens in the morning and during the festive days; it becomes mandatory to take a bath before preparing the *bhog* (offering to the Gods) and conducting the other rituals of

¹⁰⁵ the venue for the puja

¹⁰⁶ a deep-fried bread made of maida

the *Puja*. Only after the *puja* is completed do the devotees get the opportunity to consume the *Prasad*. While addressing the issue of time, Mona adds, “*On Eid we prepare about ten to twelve items, which also includes desserts and serve our guests. We are very particular about the timings. We maintain a strict regime to wake up, pray, break our fasts and start our iftar.*”¹⁰⁷

Most of the dietary habits followed in India are based mainly on vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism. Centuries back, the higher caste Brahmins refused to eat food cooked by lower caste people. Though Indians have evolved out of that stature, vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism is one parameter which remains a stable to determine the austerity of the religion followed.

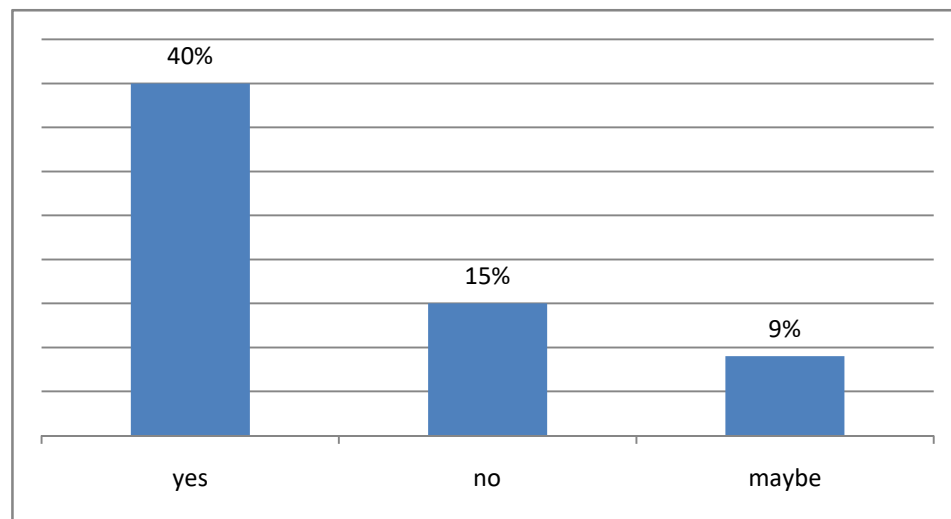


Fig. 1. Graph showing whether the Indian Americans retain and practice the rituals while cooking and consumption of food after migration. Source: From the fieldwork

In the above pages, I have tried to analyze and describe the ritualistic practices maintained by the Indian Americans. The analysis has been well depicted in the figure illustrated above where it shows that 40% of the respondents still adhere to the ritualistic practices that they used to follow

¹⁰⁷ evening meal eaten after the sun goes down during the month of Ramadan

in India, even after migration. The rituals that they used to follow in India are still maintained by the first generation Indian Americans, whereas their off springs or the ones who have got married to Americans are not keen to follow the traditional practices.

5.4. Dietary habits: Vegetarianism vs. Non-Vegetarianism

As the food is an enlightening factor in preserving the cultural identity of the Diaspora, it also includes the maintenance of the dietary habits as well as the adoption of wider range of dietary practices. While there are mixed responses on the kitchen being dominated by women in the Diaspora, cooking and preparation of food in the households are strong markers of ethnic identity in the Diaspora. Saunders (2007, 204) suggests, that Hindus, who live in India, often equate their religiousness with their dietary habits. Many Hindus in India are observed to follow a strict vegetarian diet while they live in India, while some others who are living outside India are often equated with being non-vegetarians. With the widely prevalent food politics in India, it has been observed that most of the Hindu Brahmins adhere to strict vegetarian diets (with a few exceptional cases), while the other portion of the population is more widely involved in taking vegetarian diet on certain auspicious days of the year. According to Sayeed (2014), “70% of the world’s vegetarians reside in India. With the familiar brands of KFC, McDonald’s, Pizza Hut preparing and serving non-vegetarian food all over the world, McDonald’s *Mcaloo tikki*, *McVeggie* or *Veg KingKong*¹⁰⁸ is also served along with the non-vegetarian menu”.

Tracing back to the historical traits of vegetarianism in India, “the earliest records of vegetarianism came from ancient India and ancient Greece in the early 5th Century BCE”. Vegetarianism has found its place in the earliest histories of Indian religious scriptures and

¹⁰⁸ These are the names of the vegetarian items that are available in the famous food joints of McDonalds.

books, especially the *Vaishnav*¹⁰⁹ sect of Hinduism who abstains from killing and consuming animals. In India, vegetarianism is well connected with *ahimsa* or non-violence, which was promoted across history through many religious leaders and philosophers. However, the practice of vegetarianism was not only practiced among Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, but it was also practiced by some of the Parsis. “Vegetarianism can be traced to the early Vedic period, a period between 4000 and 1500 B.C”. The *Yajur veda* states that, “You must not use your God-given body for killing God’s creatures, whether they be human, animal or whatever”. (12:32)¹¹⁰. There are similar references found in the other religious scriptures of Jainism and Buddhism, where they are observed to practice non-vegetarianism. It was Swami Vivekananda who brought the issue of vegetarianism vs. non-vegetarianism “within the orbit of contemporary nationalist concerns about masculinity and physical culture”. (Sengupta 2012, 84). While there are many families who practice strict vegetarian diets in their respective families, there are other families also who practice non-vegetarian diet which is done mainly on weekends or any special occasion. Of course the variety and consistency of consumption differs on economical background and the ethics of the family. In my observation, most of the respondents belonging to the state of West Bengal are non-vegetarians, consuming vegetarian meal only on certain days of the year, in which they celebrate certain *pujas* or ceremonies, while the women from the other communities are mostly vegetarian following the diet all through the year. In South Asia, food is a component which binds and relates the classes, hierarchies and also defines moral and ethnic structure. Food carries a different set of meanings for each segment of society. Hinduism follows a hierarchical caste system, where the *Brahmins* are considered to top the list and the *Shudras* are downtrodden. Speaking of rituals and customs of consumption, Swapna M. Bannerjee (2004) in

¹⁰⁹ A Hindu sect devoted to the cult of Vishnu.

¹¹⁰ <https://ivu.org/news/march2000/hinduism.html>

her book *Men, Women and Domesticity* surveys about the identity formation of the Bengali household in the 18th and 19th century Bengal; which gets identified with cooks and the exploitations of cooks, which originated from Odisha. The middle-class Bengali household did not want to eat food that was cooked by lower caste people as it would lead to caste contamination. With the shortage in hiring of high caste Brahmins as cooks in the households, Bengal turned on to Odisha to hire cooks. These observations display strong emotions with food acting as a cultural system, a symbol of categories and emotions.

“[...] Foods in the mode of goodness increase the duration of life purify one’s existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such nourishing foods are sweet, juicy, fattening and palatable. Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, pungent, and dry and hot, are liked by people in the mode of passion. Such foods cause pain, distress and disease. Food cooked more than three hours before being eaten which is tasteless, stale, putrid, decomposed and unclean, is food liked by people in the mode of ignorance.”
(Bhagvad Gita 17.7-10)¹¹¹

An excerpt from the Bhagvad Gita shows the importance of vegetarian food in the daily dietary habits of the Hindus. According to the prevalent Hindu customs and traditions in India, it is believed that the people who follow vegetarian diets are morally superior to the other castes and “this marks a hierarchy and a marker of upper-caste identity”. According to the Hindu beliefs and customs, consuming beef is a sin, as slaughtering cows is considered a heinous crime. Contrary to the popular belief, beef eating is prevalent in almost all the religions, including Hinduism. Beef is sold and eaten across India but majority of beef eaters are concentrated in Kerala, Kashmir and North-East India. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruling the centre in

¹¹¹ <https://asitis.com/17/8-10.html>

India, a party that adheres to the ideologies of Hinduism has broadened their rule to banning non-vegetarianism in certain parts of the country. This comprehensive ban is also valid on covering bulls and bullocks. (Bahl and Purakayastha, 2015). This particular dietary choice that is followed in India has changed in many aspects. After migration, many people have adopted certain dishes which they were disallowed to take while residing in India. As Annapurna, a respondent says, *“I was not allowed to touch beef, while I was in India with my family. After I moved into the US, I got married to an American, and have discarded off the taboo of not eating beef”*. Contrary to the statement made by Annapurna, Shatabdi says, *“I still follow the same rituals and practices that were followed in India. I have been residing in the USA for about 8 years, and I have still not touched beef or experimented with newer cuisines.”*

Sudeshna, one of the respondent says she consumes, vegetarian items like *khichuri*,¹¹² tomato chutney, cabbage curry, papad, dessert, like *payesh* and sweets. The other days of the year, she consumes non vegetarian diet.

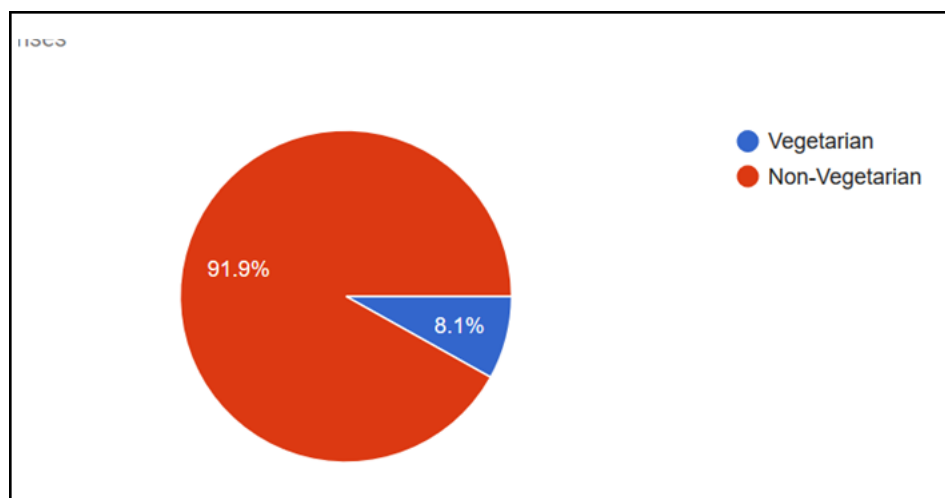


Fig. 2. Pie chart which shows the proportion of vegetarian and non- vegetarian population among the respondents.

Source: From the fieldwork.

¹¹² It is a salty dish, more like porridge, which is cooked in slow flame with rice, lentils and vegetables.

The chart portrays the proportion of the population consuming vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. The chart signifies that most of the respondents follow non vegetarian diet all through the year, except for some of the days of the year. According to my observation, the numbers of people who consume vegetarian cuisine as a part of their diet are refrained from having flesh, eggs and certain products which are considered as stimulants, like onion and garlic. The respondents who follow vegetarian rules in the dietary habits are observed to be from the regions of North India and some southern states in India like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. This chart emphasizes certain food preferences and lifestyle preferences which include fasting, rituals and other food practices observed during certain festivals in the year. It is also noted that vegetarians have also imposed vegetarian dietary habits in their children, and they follow it in their homes. Though, the vegetarian homes also included non vegetarian influences, when the children or the men in the family opt for eating out or taking away food from restaurants. It has also been observed that the women in the family are the strict followers of the vegetarian diet, whereas the men and children have non vegetarian influences in their dietary habits. Anita affirms on asking her about her daily dietary habits, *“I am a strict follower of vegetarian diet in my household, whereas my children and husband often tend to eat meat outside the realms of the household.”* D’Sylva and Beagan (2011, 280) also states in the diasporic context that, “the purveyors of culture are often the women who are expected to be keepers of tradition and sowers of culture in their families and the larger community. One of the central ways in which culture is transmitted – or transformed- is through food practices”. Smita, a respondent, also adds, *“After I migrated to the US, I was married to a Hindu Brahmin and we strictly followed vegetarian diet. After my divorce and my re marriage to Pat, we follow a mixed diet. I am still a vegetarian whereas my sons and husband follow non-vegetarian diets. They also consume idli, dosa, chutney and the*

like. It's not that we cook only vegetarian food; we cook non-vegetarian food as well in our home on all days of the week. We do not follow any strict diet on any festivals or pujas."

Most of the Hindu households in India observe different food habits than the native Americans. Not only, do the dietary habits differ in terms of vegetarianism and non- vegetarianism, the ways of eating is one more aspect which has to be brought to notice. As Tharoor (1997, 320) states that, "[W]hereas Northerners confine themselves to the very tips of their fingers, southerners think nothing of dipping their hands into a communal dish, Hindus are careful of not to let the hand they are eating with touch someone else's plate, let alone a bowl others have to help themselves from". Most of the Hindu households I have interviewed are very careful with touching each other's plate while eating. *"We consider it as chchuta¹¹³ when we touch each other's plate while eating, with the same hand. We are very particular about that. We also cook in separate vessels for the offerings prepared for the deities during our festivals"*, says Anita.

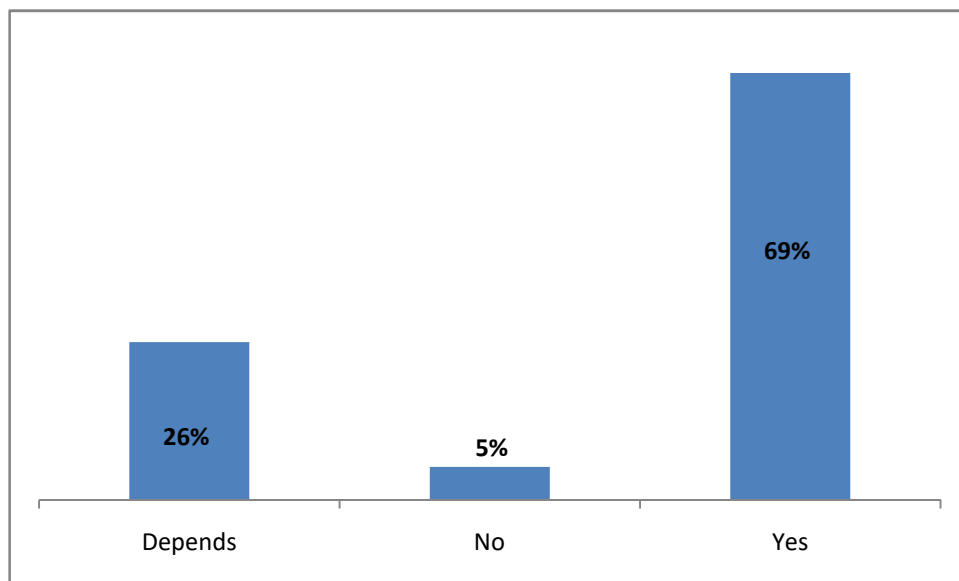


Fig. 3. Graph showing the percentage of respondents who use their hands while eating.

Source: From the fieldwork

¹¹³ defiled

In the above figure, I have tried to graph down the responses where they have stated whether they eat with their hands after migration too. While we speak of rituals, eating with hands is often considered an Indian ritual where majority of the Indian population is seen to be using their bare hands while eating. I had questioned my respondents if they still maintain the same habit or if it has changed. The responses have been recorded in the graph, where it is prominently observed that the majority of my respondents, i.e; 69% maintain the same habit, whereas a meagre 5 % do not maintain the habit of using their hands while eating. An estimated 26% of the respondents are not very sure of their eating habits as they have mentioned that when they are with their friends or colleagues, they do not use hands while eating. One of my respondents, Shahana said in this context, *“It is my habit to use my hands while I eat. My husband and children are often seen to be using forks, knives and spoon when they go out, but eating with hands is mandatory when at home. We feel we are at home when we sit together at our dining table and eat with our hands.”*

In my observation, the first generation migrants are more likely to observe the rules and rituals that they used to observe in India. On the contrary, there are some others who are an exception to the general crowd. Annapurna, a first generation migrant who got married to an American, contradicts by saying, *“I have never followed the rules of vegetarianism or non vegetarianism in India. After I got married to Zach (an American) in the US, we follow the festivals of both the cultures. We are a strictly non-vegetarian couple who never adhere to any religious obligations”*. The second generation migrants bear completely different values and ideals when it comes to following vegetarian diets. Most of the second generation migrants identify themselves as Americans rather than being Indians. Shakul, a second generation migrant asserts, *“My parents are Indians, whereas I was brought up in the US. I do not live with my parents. I*

live in a separate apartment now, where I cook and eat according to my whims. When I lived with my parents, I ate whatever was prepared by my parents, but following a strict vegetarian diet was never on my list. Now, I cook and prepare the dishes that I like to eat.”

The consumption of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism food in our diet is an important trait of Indian cuisine. According to my observation, migration has changed some of the traits of the diet followed in India, but most of the families tend to follow the same dietary pattern.

5.5. The role of Women in the Diasporic kitchens

A kitchen is a space which is generally used for preparing food, but with the evolution of studies on food and the other related aspects, it has been regarded to be a space which designates the daily chefs as powerful beings, which are rendered to be powerless by others. As Deidre D. Mathee (2004) justifies that kitchen is used by women not just for cooking and preparing food; but they also use this space to implement food rituals, their expertise in this field and also connect with the other family members. The sociologist Majorie DeVault (1991) argues on the fact that preparation of food is a work that shapes and defines a family. While the male members are expected to work outside and earn wages, through the work of feeding the family “women quite literally produce family life from day to day” (Majorie DeVault 1991, 13). This task of feeding and preparing food is overlooked as it does not add any financial help to the family.

Apart from nourishing and feeding the family, the kitchen also poses a space where the women exhibit their culinary expertise. Food has been associated with women in works done on anorexia, bulimia and other eating disorders. Recent studies have revealed that food studies have also been linked with women which are equally significant. The varied complex issues of food and women have been elaborated first in Avakian’s anthology *Through the Kitchen Window:*

Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking (1997, 1998) where the essays demonstrate the various contexts of food and its relation to women. In this part of my research, I would like to draw upon the scholarly comments on how the kitchen space has acted as a depressing space in the household for women and the later evolutions of research on how the kitchen space has become “a site of liberation rather than oppression in the Diasporic context”. “Food is significant for its ability to evoke a multifaceted experience of place.” (Law 2001, 267)

In the Diasporic context, it is not important what we eat, but where we eat. (Bell and Valentine, 1997) According to Blunt and Dowling (2006, 197), home can exist in more than one place: “diasporic, transnational and global imaginaries influence, and are themselves influenced by, everyday, domestic experiences and practices.” They have also argued that “food’s relationship to transnational forms of home is multiple.” One of the prominent changes that the migrants have undergone after migrating to the other country is the change in the family structure. In India, most of the families stay together in the form of a joint family, whereas in the Diaspora, the family structure changes from the joint family to nuclear family. The respondents in my research are first generation migrants.

According to Blunt and Dowling (2006, 27), “Home as a place is a porous, open intersection of social relations and emotions.” It is often defined as a place where the senses of emotions stretch across diverse scales from the household to the city and the entire world. As stated by Blunt and Dowling (2006), home can be situated in multiple places, the home in the Diaspora can also be reconstructed as home in the homeland by recreating the homely space through the kitchen and food. With this reference, I would like to state the situation in the kitchens in the Diaspora. The main focus would be on if there is any shift in the gender roles in the Diasporic kitchens or they are the same after migration. Ray (2004, 116) states with reference to the gendered roles in the

kitchens, that “most men do not have any experience of cooking before migration. Before marriage, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and servants do all the food-related work in the most strictly generated division of labor.” Women have been regarded as the unsung heroes of the kitchen for decades. My research would delve into this topic to find out if the scenario differs in the Diaspora or it remains the same.

Kitchen work involves a number of steps including planning, purchasing, storing, cooking and preparing food, as well as tasks such as washing and cleaning. Since this kitchen work does not promote or add to the productive economy of the household, the domestic workload has been regarded as valueless or has often been derided. (DeVault, 1991). Many other scholars like Carole Counihan (1999), report women as conflicted over kitchen work. She has argued that modern women have more economic power than their previous generations, but their role as housekeepers are less satisfied due to the shortage of time. Some scholars like Allen and Sachs (2007, 25) reinforces on the fact that the food provisioning role of the women often “represents their ties to the family and also maintain cultural traditions that are at the heart of many women’s identities”. While Richard Wilk (2015, 3) states that “...cooking is about quality. Women take pride in their ability to cook well”, others see cooking as a means of servitude, demonstrating women as subordinate in the households. Therefore, “cooking is a form of gender.” As Bludau (2008, 3) states, “the role of the kitchen work in the identity formation of women is very significant. Food work helps women to construct their place in the family as a provider of needs; food is the medium through which a system of relationships within the family is expressed and negotiated.”

Over the centuries, the kitchen space has evolved from being the arena dominated by women to a place of sociality where material objects such as cookers, food processors and other specialist

gadgets are consumed both for what they make possible and for the role they play in actively configuring their users. (Shove et al., 2007). The change noticed in the scenario of the kitchen space also speaks about the participatory roles of men in the kitchens which were not observed earlier. In the 1960s and 70s Anglo-American feminists have pointed out that the kitchen space have made women as “captive wives” and “household mothers” (Gavron, 1966) who were saddled with the endless responsibilities of the household, attaching significance to masculine rather than feminine roles. (Oakley 1985, 2). Floyd (2004, 62) has argued that, the kitchen represents a space in the “First and Third World Countries are ‘brought home’, a recess repellent to middle-class woman and domestic worker alike”. Haber (1997, 68) has also supported the view by saying that the emphasis on the negative dimensions of food and its preparation reflect “intellectual framework that sees food and its preparation as fraught with conflict, coercion and frustration.” Avakian (2007, 6) has also argued that “cooking is more complex than victimization... If we delve into the relationship between women and food we will discover how women have forged spaces within that oppression.” Barolini (2007, 235) taking in reference her Italian-American upbringing, has argued “the so-called women’s room (the kitchen from what describes as ‘a holding pen’ into an embassy of cultural tradition”. Abarca (2007, 23) has reaffirmed that “cooking is a skill, a celebration of their talent and identity”. In fact, many of these women have reported that cooking provided a space through which they could express their identity and survival politics. The space of kitchen is also considered as a site for offering sacrifices and performing religious rites. Citing Ghosh (1995), Krishnendu Ray (2004, 117) says, that in Hindu tradition, “women assume the responsibility of conveying the transfer of divine beneficence that occurs during the offering and blessing of food ... serv[ing] it to her family as if she were a priest. The kitchen is considered, the heart of the sacred geography of home”.

According to Lupton (1996, 31), “Emotions, like food and eating, are commonly regarded as the preserve of the embodied self rather than the disembodied, philosophizing mind. Like food and eating practices, the emotions are traditionally linked with the feminine, with the disempowered and marginalized.”

Among the migrant societies, it has been observed that maintaining cultural ties with the homeland seeks more importance than achieving gender equality. In this reference, Longhurst et.al (2009, 340) also affirms that cooking at home can enable migrant women to “take on the challenges of a new life in a new place”, took forward to a feeling of belonging which can be deciphered as “a performative politics of one’s subjectivity.” (2009, 342)

Women are sometimes addressed as “gatekeepers of the family larder”. (Counihan, cited in Holtzman, 2002, 269) They are regarded as “domestic politics of food allocation within the household.” To add another angle to kitchen work being depressive and unrewarding, Basu (1995, 8) observes that the work women do in the “privatized nuclear household”, foodwork is regarded as oppressive. However, “when transformed into public domain activities [it] become[s] the basis of social recognition [and] might actually contribute to the transformation, rather than the reinforcement of gender subjectivities.”

Looking from a different perspective, cooking is just not been confined within the domains of femininity. Anyone who is acquainted with the daily food shows and food media would deny that women are the ones who are the most active participants in the kitchens cooking food. From Gordon Ramsay to Vineet Bhatia, the images of men cooking are now very commonly found in the Western as well as Indian cultures through media. While the world celebrates male chefs and their achievements in the world of cuisine; the women are less in number when it comes to

female celebrity chefs. However, Swinbank (2002) has noted that the involvement of men in the kitchens is mostly by choice and some others have also affirmed that men are involved in the kitchens to show their competence with the modern technologies available in the contemporary kitchens. Women comprise less than 40 percent of paid cooks and less than 20 percent of head cooks and chefs. (U.S. Bureau of Labour and Statistics 2005a in Forson, Counihan, 2013)

Sudeshna, a first generation migrant, has pointed out very aptly, *“It is said that the best chefs in the world are male. Even in remote villages in India, we get help for preparing food we see mostly male cooks preparing food in large social gatherings or occasions. So, it is not only women who are related to cooking and food. In India, we get help for cooking and preparing food for us, but in US, many of us can’t afford help. So, both the husband and wife cook and help in preparing the meal for the household. My husband mostly cooks on weekends as he loves to cook.”* I have also concluded that Indian-Americans are involved in doing more household work than they used to do when they resided in India due to the absence of servants. With reference to this, I would like to quote Harriet Beecher (as quoted in Fussell 1983, 12) as she said, “This want of servants is the one thing that must modify everything in American life.”

Speaking about the Indian immigrants in the United States, they are one of the fastest growing immigrants in the USA. Food is a “distinctive feature of immigrant lives, helping to forge communal solidarity.” (Rayaprol, 1997, 67) Research on Indian immigrants in the USA have confirmed that as the migrants move away from their own culture and tradition, they move towards the mainstream American culture resulting in acculturation (Rogler, 1994). In Indian homes, the role of a care giver and feeder is assigned to the women of the family, and when they migrate to other countries, they tend to carry their own culture and traditions along with them. “Women are in charge of the home, including food preparation, and everyday needs”, says

Khandelwal (2002). In addition to handling the charges of the household work, women are also responsible to maintain the 'memory work' as said by Rayaprol (1997), which shapes the identity of the Indian migrant.

In this part of my research, I would like to analyze the thoughts of the respondents for the stereotyped gendered roles prevalent in India. South Asians, to be more specific, Indians are noted to be particular about food and food studies. The immigrants see food as not just a way of sustenance, but food and rituals as a way to maintain connections with the nation and to construct 'ethnic, religious and caste identities'. When asked about the importance of food in their daily lives, the respondents replied enthusiastically. Astha says, *"Food is something with which we connect with our community in the Diaspora, as well as with the other family members. As we are a working couple, dinner is the one time when we sit together and eat and talk"*. While many of my respondents have agreed on the same, Swagata differs in her opinion, when she says, *"I am not very fond of food. Thus, it doesn't have a huge significance in my life. I literally eat to survive. Given a choice to live without food, I would surely opt for that."* When asked they have expressed their opinion on the gendered roles in India and if they are prevalent in the Diaspora after migration. Most families in India, while preserving family traditions have predefined gendered roles, where the household chores of cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing are taken up by the women in the household. Some even have servants to help them in fulfilling their daily needs, whereas the scenario differs in the Diaspora. As has been stated by Srinivas (2006,199), "...in the Diasporic Indian family, the links between motherhood and provisioning are engaged somewhat differently as nuclear Indian families find themselves with no family members, extended kin or servants to help... Indian women, in the diasporic context, are usually

expected both by their families and by themselves, to run the household, whether they work outside the home or not.”

Food is also considered the primary reason for conflict as it “encodes the primary consequences of gender distinction”. (Appadurai, 1981). According to Annapurna, one of my respondents, *“along with the family structure changing from joint families to nuclear ones, the gender roles in the household have also changed”*. Most of the women in India shared household responsibilities like cooking as well as preparing for religious rituals like *Karwa Chauth*, *Diwali*, *Durga Puja* and the like. The first generation women, after migration, have been observed to perform the rituals in their own ways, but with help from their male counterparts. Similarly, Avakian (2005, 261) have mentioned that women in the diasporic context have contradictory views on foodways and may use it to “transgress patriarchy”. In this context, I would like to quote Sandipta, one of my respondents who stated, *“Cooking and maintaining household chores are always considered the sole responsibilities of the women. The non-working women perform the duties of child rearing, dropping the children to school, cooking, cleaning, washing and the like. I am blessed with a co-operative husband who also participates in all the housework.”* According to Krishnendu (2004), men in India are not entitled with the task of cooking or any other household chores. They are given the responsibility of acquiring groceries, whereas Indian men in the USA are often compelled to cook after marriage and are observed to be sharing the household work with the women. Garima also adds, *“My husband didn’t even know how to boil water in India, as his mother did everything that was conducive for him. It was only after migration to the USA that he started to learn how to cook for himself and it was out of compulsion. After our wedding, I am the one who almost manages to cook, whereas my husband performs the cleaning and washing chores. We both go out for grocery shopping.”* Cooking and preparing food in India is

considered a very prominent section, where family members bond with each other, as well as with the others outside the family. As a respondent, Shatabdi states, *“In India, I used to help my mother-in-law with the daily cooking and household activities. We always cooked the dishes that were the favourites of my husband. After coming to the USA, I have gained the liberty of handling the kitchen by myself and cooking has also been easy and the daily menu also includes some of my favourite dishes.”* It has been observed more than once, that women are more comfortable in the kitchens in Diaspora and “largely experience cooking not as a burden but as an important way of staying viscerally connected with their homes”. According to Appadurai (1981, 500), a daughter-in-law is always “expected to play a meek, sub-ordinate and labour intensive role in her husband’s family, but she is specifically the instrument of her mother-in-law’s desires, especially in the culinary domain.” However, the situations change as the daughter-in-law get a firmer position in the household and the mother-in-law gets relinquished from her powers on the hearth of the household. In accordance to this argument, I would also like to bring into notice, the scholars like Sutor and Barbour, (1975) and Burt and Hertzler, (1978) have asserted that many women in traditional families often have to keep in mind the concerns, likes and dislikes of the elderly and the male members, especially, the husband, while planning and preparing meals. Often the meal planning and preparation, if not done according to the men’s choice leads to negative consequences like arguments which subsequently leads to domestic violence. (Ellis 1983, Murcott, 1982) Another respondent, Sutapa argues the stereotypical feature observed in the kitchens. She states, *“Times are changing and I do see more men in the kitchen now, than that what I saw as a kid growing up in Kolkata. One reason why females are more inclined towards kitchens is due to women being instinctive nurturers. And food is one way that can demonstrate that nurturing towards their family and children. Another*

reason could be that the men in the house choose not to step into the kitchen. (In my house, my husband can cook, too. I have not grown up with men cooking daily food and didn't expect anything different after marriage. But my husband knowing cooking took me by surprise)." One more factor that is held responsible for the shift in gender roles in the kitchen is the availability of the modern techniques available in the American kitchens which saves time and energy for the men working in the kitchens. In India, most of the cooking is still done by "the servant-wife complex of cookery." As stated by Ray¹¹⁴ again, "After I migrated to the US, I didn't know how to cook. I was fed thrice a day and that is certainly a privilege of masculinity, class etc." still practiced in India. The scenario changes after migration. When a young male migrates he is not expected to cook, but is forced to learn the art of cooking and prepare food for himself for sustainability. Rather than choice, a male enters the kitchen to sustain himself and somewhat serve food; mainly traditional, to maintain the linkages with the homeland. I have also observed a lot of shift in gender roles in the kitchen due to the use of modern techniques. Avinanda, one of my respondents has asserted by adding, *"At times, I do follow some of the typical modern techniques like using a hand mixer for kneading dough, preparing a lot of dishes with a twist and popping them in the oven. My husband comes in the kitchen to save his time by cooking with the help of modern techniques. He prefers to prepare the sauces and spices in the grinder at home rather than buying the jars from stores. Cooking with the available modern techniques helps to save time and also makes my husband do the cooking mostly on weekends."*

Most of the women have responded to be shifting from a joint family structure to a nuclear family, where it is easier for them to adjust their lives accordingly in the Diaspora. Prior to migration, these women would never get any help from their family counterparts and cooking,

¹¹⁴ [tps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knSJz6cWuTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knSJz6cWuTA)

serving and maintaining their household kitchens would be their primary concern. Whereas in the USA, women have admitted that men have also come up with participating in helping women with daily household chores if the couple is working. As has been stated by Kshama, one of my respondents, there could be three probable reasons for the shift in gender roles in the kitchen. The three reasons are- *“the wife is also working and is unable to spend as much time on weekdays, the man comes from a family where there are no such gender roles, the man has more interest in cooking than the wife.”* Paromita also bears the same opinion where her husband spends pretty good time in the kitchen and what she hears from her husband’s friends and acquaintances that cooking is very refreshing for them. Scholars like Engberg (1996) argues that even if men are seen more in the kitchen in the contemporary times, they are marginally involved in the household chores, when it comes to cooking and providing food to the family. Though my respondents have argued stating that men like to cook a lot and it has been evidently proved in the responses mentioned above.

It has also been observed in my findings that women are reluctant to leave their kitchens and they have carved out an identity through food and kitchens in the Diaspora. There are many who have strictly followed their own rules and regulations to follow the tradition of preparing and serving food to maintain their ethnic identity in their host land. Food blogging and vlogging is a recent trend followed by innumerable women migrants to create an identity for themselves and maintain their ties with their homelands. As said by Pritha about food blogging and creating an identity for themselves, she says, *“...visa is a huge issue overseas, and even if many people have work permits, landing a suitable job in an alien country can be difficult. Many women, thus, chose to vent their creativity through food and musings and photography to create an identity of their own as well as reach out to more people of their kind.”*

Most of the women whom I have interviewed have professed the idea that the kitchen is no more a female dominated arena, where the cooking, preparing and serving is done solely by the women of the household. It differs deeply in the Diaspora and a number of respondents have agreed on the same. As stated by Anita, when asked about the roles played in the household and in the kitchen, she has negated on the women ruled household and said, *“I think that was way back when women were the sole care takers of the kitchen. Modern households don’t function that way anymore. Both men and women cook and take care of their families.”* While Sreeparna has said, that she is the one who cooks the most in her kitchen, she also opposes the idea that women are the sole care takers of the kitchen. Studies conducted by Zimmerman et al. (2001), Coltrane, (1996) and the like have argued that with times changing, mothers are still considered as experts when it comes to taking care of the children and nourishing them. Fathers are often observed to take a backseat when it comes to child rearing activities. Angana, another of my respondent has affirmed with the scholars and when she was asked about the role of her husband in taking care of her children she said, *“My husband is a very good cook and he enjoys cooking as well. Whereas when it comes to looking after my children and feeding them, I am the one who is solely responsible for that.”*

According to Rayaprol (1997), women are the ones who are responsible for “memory work”, in turn, framing the ethnic identity of the Indians in the Diaspora. Women, who are often considered as the cultural barriers of a nation or an ethnicity, are expected to cook authentic dishes, wearing ethnic clothes and performing *pujas* and other rituals. Since, women are the icons of culture and authenticity; they are burdened with the responsibility of carrying on the legacies and preserving the culture, “in the form of religion, language, dress, food and child-rearing”. (Das Gupta and Das Das Gupta 2000, 327) Shivani, another of the respondents, affirms

when she was asked about the role of women in religious activities. She says, *“During Diwali, Shivratri, Janmashtami, women are the ones who take up the responsibility of fasting, performing the rituals of the pujas, whereas men are prone to cook or knead dough as it amounts to large quantities.”* Other than cooking, looking after the elderly and child rearing activities, women are also expected to perform the ritualistic practices to carve out the ethnic identity.

Though women still hold the sole responsibility of performing household chores, men have also taken up the responsibilities of cooking and other household chores in the family and massive changes have been observed among the families in the Diasporic community where men and women work equally in all the sections of life.

5.6. Dietary habits of the migrants

As said by Colleen Taylor Sen (2016), it was after the American Revolution that “the wealthy American colonists” imported Indian food ingredients like “tea, pepper, ginger, cardamom, saffron, turmeric, cumin and curry powder”. As has been stated in one of the earlier chapters, Indians have been migrating to the USA primarily as agricultural labourers. The major part of the migrant population hailed from the North-Western state of India; Punjab. Primarily, it was because of the migration of the Punjabis, as agricultural labourers to the USA, the “Indian food originally found its way into North American food culture.” (Collingham 2006, 218-9) After the Punjabis migrated to the United States, they married Mexican women and the first instance of fusion foods that was cooked in the country was by the “Mexican-Hindus.” They cooked Mexican-Hindu dishes which included a wide array of dishes- chicken curry, *roti* (bread), *saag* (green leaves) and other Punjabi dishes. (Leonard 2000, 192-202). Though the dinner menu was

all Punjabi, the breakfast served at these homes included items like “cornflakes and oatmeal, and Mexican-style beans and pasta.”

“Here’s my chicken curry. Howard, your shrimp biriyani.... Palak paneer, that’s Penny... And for Rajesh Koothrappali... from whose homeland these tasty dishes originate, one large order of chicken mc nuggets.” [*The Big Bang Theory*, (Season 4, episode 2)] In this famous American sitcom, the Indian student named Rajesh Koothrappali is not willing to have the traditional Indian cuisine and orders chicken mcnuggets, a typical American dish, whereas his American friends opted for authentic Indian dishes. Many of my respondents (9% of the total number of respondents) who are students have opined that cooking an elaborate Indian spread requires a lot of time. Satashree, an engineering student at UCLA (University of California), affirmed, “*After coming back from lab, it seems almost impossible to cook rice, lentils and vegetables. It is much more convenient if I cook ready to cook food or order pasta or burgers for dinner*”. It has been concluded in this context that while some Indians opt to order American food, there are others who are eager to cook and order Indian food as they long for their ethnic food. Taniya, a PhD student opined, “*Whenever I come back home from the university, aloo sedho and bhaat (boiled potatoes and rice) served with ghee gives me ultimate solace. After a long day in the campus, it’s good to come back to Indian food. This reminds me of my country and my mother.*”

A completely different set of migrants who had migrated to the United States were the students who had come to the country to fulfill their aspirations. To mention the students, I would also like to state the students who have also formed a meager part of my respondents. This class of migrants has also formed a considerable part of the migrant population and food, to them has also formed a string to tie them to their homelands. As mentioned by Subhradweep, a masters student at University of Pennsylvania, “*Food to me has formed an interminable link to my*

homeland". Migration has made changes in the dietary patterns of these students- "*Being away from family, makes me long for homemade traditional food*", says Aasma. While speaking about the dietary habits, there has been noticeable changes in their diet habits, as "*I have shifted from having rice, veg curry and chicken curry for lunch to having lentil soup, fries for lunch after coming to the United States*", says Aakash. While I have tried to analyze the gendered roles in the kitchens after migration, one aspect of this have also come to notice, when the male students have participatory roles in the kitchens. As they come alone, it is noticeable that they cook and prepare their own meals, which are mainly traditional dishes.

With the shortage of women in the migratory population earlier, it was not possible for the men to cook traditional food in the USA. Later on, with the arrival of the women (as has been described earlier in the thesis) came along the taste of the homeland.

As stated by Appadurai (1988,1), food is the central playing force for the migrants- "whatever might have been at its place of putative origin- tenaciously tethered to economies that are simultaneously and irreducibly national and moral." "With the ever-increasing number of Indian immigrants in the USA, the popularity and spread of Indian food all over the country is observed with the popularity of Indian restaurants and the ethnic grocery stores". In sharp contrast to the earlier pattern of migration, when the prevalent population was male centered, the recent trends in the Indian population has a larger number of female migrants pouring in as housewives, skilled professionals and students. About two-thirds of the Indian populations in the USA are married, and more than 70 percent live in households (Reeves and Bennett 2000, 7-8). The second generation migrants are more particular about food and what they opt for is fusion food. While their parents are more into inculcating Indian values and traditions in them, regional food becomes an important part of such socialization. (Visveswaran, 2001) "*My daughter, a school*

going kid is more into eating fries and chips, and avoids traditional meals cooked at home”, says Ashalata. Similar to food habits, there are other cultural traits that the first generation migrants try to instill in their children, which include language, dance, music and the like. Most of the second generation migrants are more prone to learning the regional language from where their parents belong. Most of my respondents have also stated that in spite of trying to teach the traditional values to their children, they have failed to imbibe it in the proper way, with a few exceptions. While Sudeshna and her husband speak in Bengali at their home, their 8 year old daughter is not able to speak her regional language appropriately; Nayan’s 4 year old son is an adept at speaking Marathi, their mother tongue.

While most of the immigrants claim to be cooking and consuming traditional ethnic Indian food in the kitchens after migration, a question often arises as to a cuisine which is borrowed from outside and is based on “blatantly exogenous to the prototypically authentic”, the concept of “traditional” is confusing. (Nandy, 2004, 11) It has been observed that many such ingredients that we use as traditional Indian ingredients are American, inclusive of “potatoes, tomatoes, kidney beans, maize, bell peppers and chilli peppers.” While these ingredients are indigenous to America, the other dietary changes that are observed in the Indian immigrants are the consumption of Italian and American food at large and in some cases, a shift from vegetarianism to non-vegetarianism, observed particularly amongst Hindu migrants.

With the arrival of the professionals or graduate students from India in the United States which dates back to the early 1970s, the Indian grocery stores and markets were available in areas such as Chicago, New York, Texas, Washington, Florida, New Jersey, California, Los Angeles and the like. As the Indian population poured increasingly in the USA, ethnic markets and Indian grocery stores came into prominence in the other states of the USA. (Leonard, 1997) Contrary to

many respondents who have agreed on the easy availability of Indian spices and ingredients in the ethnic stores in the USA, Smita has something else to say. Smita complains of the unavailability of some of the Indian ingredients in some American cities. While Paromita says *“Chicago is affluent of the Indian ethnic stores”*, Rini disagrees with saying, *“I have difficulty in finding spices like garam masala powder. When I moved to the United States, I had difficulty in finding Indian ingredients, and my food turned into fusion food. Later, when I moved to bigger cities like New York, finding Indian ingredients was not difficult, leaving apart the above ingredients that I have mentioned.”* Sudeshna, a resident of Chicago, reports that, *“I find almost everything in all Indian and Asian shops here in Chicago, even neem leaves and beetle leaves.”*

While most of the female respondents have migrated after getting married, there are some who have migrated for seeking education and have married Americans. A very small portion of my respondents are first generation male migrants who have migrated for higher education and they have professed a very different set of thoughts. Aakash, a first generation male migrant has stated, *“I face difficulty in finding vegetables like pointed gourd, bottle gourd and many such vegetables. My monthly routine urges me to travel to a nearby town for grocery shopping, because that’s the only place where I can find varieties of Indian stuffs.”* Opposing to Aakash, Ambika, a first generation migrant has said, *“We find a variety of Indian ingredients in Sunnyvale. We even find the fine rice and scented ghee which is not available in India. We get items from Pakistan and Bangladesh as well.”* While most of my respondents living in the Indian-populated cities have agreed on the abundance of Indian grocery stores and the availability of ingredients in the USA, others have disagreed on this statement. Therefore, my findings analyze, that according to the popular notion that Indians are well connected with food,

with the easy availability of ingredients in the USA, there are many of them who do not find easy access to the ingredients of Indian food.

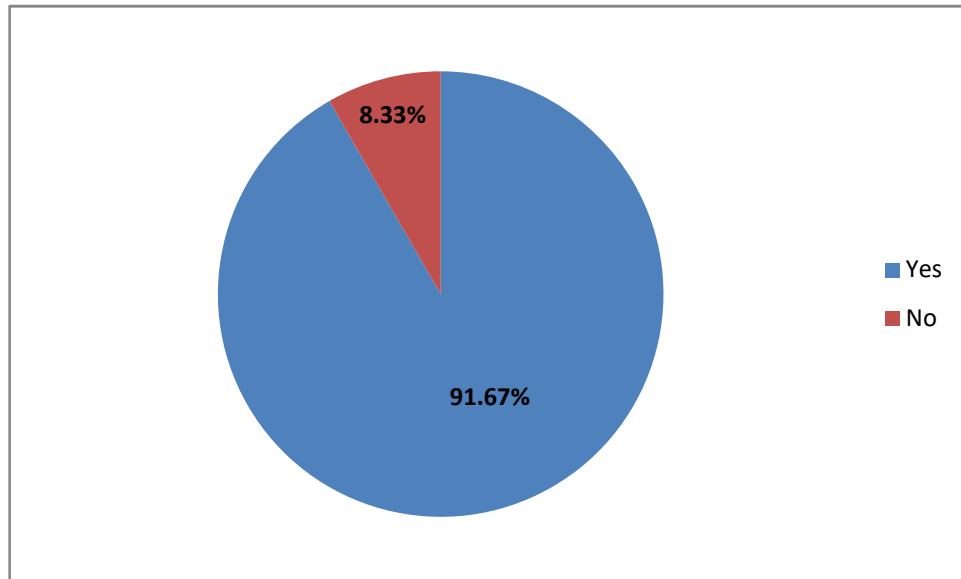


Fig 3. Pie chart showing how cooking and consumption of Indian food frames the Indian identity of the Indian Americans. Source: From the fieldwork

In the above figure that has been derived from the fieldwork, it has been observed that a majority 91.67% of the respondents have admitted that they can frame their Indian identity by cooking and consumption of Indian food. The remaining 8.33% of the respondents have replied in a negative way. Identity being one of the important aspect of study in the thesis, it has been asserted that cooking and consuming Indian food even after migration well portrays their Indian-ness even while staying in the Diaspora.

The study on the migrant Indian women in the USA was made on surveying some of the Indian families residing in the United States. Though the sample size cannot be used to draw generalizations about the larger population, the study was based on three important issues- identity of the women in the Diasporic kitchens, the rituals and norms observed in the migrant

society while practicing Indian dietary habits and customs and the common foodways of the migrant society. It sheds light on how the gender roles are dually played by both the men and the women in the migrant kitchen. It also focuses on how the women, promote their religious identity in the Diaspora by practicing many of the rules and regulations related to food, even after migration. Though migration has changed much of the dietary habits of the migrant Indians, they try to follow some of the dietary habits and carve out an identity of being Indian in the USA. This study also indicates how the kitchen plays a creative role in carving out the identity for the migrant individuals. Overall, the study foregrounds on the adaptation of some of the American food in the Indian household, as well as creating an identity by savouring and preparing traditional dishes, foodscapes and the changing gender roles in the modern migrant Indian kitchens.

Conclusion

Foodways and cuisine form an integral part of the study that has been conducted in the thesis. In my thesis, I have tried to find out how food forms an integral part to articulate identity around gender in the lives of the Diaspora. The thesis revolves around the concepts of how food is understood as a part of the cultural system and is woven within the lives of the Diaspora and how it defines the ethnic identity in the Diaspora. The canopy of food studies includes many sociological and anthropological implications which are interwoven around race, culture, gender, identity and ritual. As the thesis commences with the definition of the term Diaspora, the cultural connotations of food and its sociological importance comes to the forefront. While the research is being conducted on food studies, it has been found that food studies form an important sector in humanities and social sciences. Within the sphere of food studies, scholars have studied and conducted research on food studies finding out that cooking and consumption is a basic human activity which carries a symbolic importance. As my thesis is concentrated on the lives of the Diaspora, food is considered to be conveying cultural importance. It carries histories and stories of reformation of the recipes and histories of the families which migrated. Scholars like Krishnendu Ray (2004), David Sutton (2001), Tulasi Srinivas (2012), Arjun Appadurai (1988) and the like have conducted wide research in this arena finding out how food is a symbol of identity and how it represents culture. The Diaspora is a sect of people who carries feelings of

nostalgia, longing for home and the like and food acts as an instrument of solace by creating their own ethnic culture.

My thesis holds a view as in how food habits do not restrict itself within a particular geographical border, but also spans itself across the borders. With the migration process, food habits have also changed and evolved by not just restricting itself within the domains of its origin, but spreading across with the threads of transnationalism. Thus, the Diaspora studies have successfully tried to bring in different people of different races and ethnicities under the same canopy by following their own cultures, practices and beliefs in their own way.

This thesis also endeavored to look into the particular lives of Indian women in the Diaspora. Food and cooking is almost synonymous with women's role in the kitchens as they are considered the sole beings that are responsible for cooking, household management and the like. In my research, I have made an effort to look into the stories of migration of the Diasporic women who have either migrated with their husbands after marriage or have migrated for studies or employment. Feminist migration scholars like Bandana Purakayastha (2005), Madhulika S. Khandelwal,(1997) Stephanie J. Nawyn (2010) and the like have helped me to learn the development of migration research with the contribution of feminist research on migration. Since the identity of the migrants has been a major object of study in my thesis, Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) idea on identity politics has helped me to identify on how women have been marginalised and the voices of women have tried to emerge as one of the prominent areas of study. The feminist migration scholars have put forward a number of trajectories to show how the female pattern of migration has aided in the scholarly readings and understandings of the migration studies. I have tried to incorporate feminist cultural theories as well as theories of intersectionality which proved helpful to deduce and answer my research questions. The issue of

identity which is a major facet of my study found its importance with the study of food in this research.

Chapter One, focuses on the theoretical framework of food studies and migration. It starts with the conceptual framework of the Diaspora. The early scholars who have studied and defined the Diaspora have helped me to perform a thorough study on the history of the formation of the Diaspora, the migration stories from India to the other countries. Scholars like Judith M. Brown (2006), Diana Brydon (2006) and the like has helped me to carve out the histories of the Diaspora. As I have already mentioned that food is not just a necessity for the humans but it also carries cultural significance, the various cultural and symbolic connotations of food have been analyzed thoroughly. Food has the power to evoke comfort and it also can be understood as a social and cultural construct where a person's culture is comprehended. One of the many reasons why food had been chosen is that food acts as a motivating factor for the Diaspora to connect with their homeland.

The Diaspora is said to have been characterized by many factors like nostalgia, frame an ethnic identity, memories of the homeland and the like. I have attempted to analyze the theories by many eminent scholars who have worked on migration and how food forms an integral part to signify the cultural symbolism of food and how it forms a communicator of culture and nostalgia among the Diaspora. This thesis has been divided into many sections where I attempted to study food habits in connection with the role of women in the Diaspora and the changing food ways of the Diaspora. In this chapter, I have also analyzed the methodology that I used to conduct the survey. Apart from analyzing and studying the theoretical framework, this chapter also finds elaboration on how the research questions and objectives have been framed for the entire thesis.

Chapter Two narrates the stories of migration of the Indians to the USA. It tries to find the reasons to migrate and it also traces the migration pattern which starts from the early pattern of migration to the contemporary trend of migration of the Indians to the USA. The chapter also provides a lens to look at the laws of migration which eventually took turns and changed according to the need to restrict migration from the Asian countries to the USA. Though America is a country which allows every ethnic community to survive following their own culture and traditions, stricter rules were being imposed on the entry of Asians to the USA. Scholars like Lee (1999), Leonard (2010) have been mentioned where they have thoroughly analyzed some of the specifics of the migration of different Indian communities to the USA.

As the chapter progresses, the migration of women comes to the limelight, where the migration histories of women to the USA has been elaborated. Scholars like Leonard (2007) have noticed how the migration of men had formed the basic studies of migration and how the study of women in the migration studies had been undermined. With the gradual evolution in feminist migration studies, the scholarly articles of Carol Upadhyay (2006) has helped me to gain knowledge on women who now do not migrate as just housewives, but they also migrate as professionals and students. After migration, the question of identity comes to the forefront where Indian housewives in the USA, struggle to carve their own identity in the Diaspora.

Chapter Three elaborates and discusses the literary representations of the Indian Diaspora. I have chosen novels namely, *Feasting, Fasting* (1999) by Anita Desai, *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with recipes* (2003) by Shobha Narayan, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni and *Pastries: A novel of deserts and discoveries* (2003) by Bharti Kirchner. The authors of these novels form a strong part of the Diaspora and the themes of the novels discuss how food brings back nostalgia and memory among the Diaspora. Most of the

novels that I have aimed to discuss and analyze in terms of identity, gender and memory form the popular reading list of the avid readers. In my findings, the authors who had migrated from India are reminiscent of their homelands and it is well reflected in their writings. This chapter has also focused on the issue of national identity among the diasporic communities. The dual identity is formed among the diasporic communities which in turn provide a sense of loss and displacement. Cuisine forms a dominant section through which the diasporic authors reflect their thoughts and perceptions. This chapter is based on the critical analysis of the relationship between the authentic cuisines which help to promote ethnic identity among the Diasporic communities, which has been deftly portrayed by the authors.

Chapter Four has tried to reframe the cultural identity of women through the arena of blogosphere. In this chapter, I have tried to investigate how women who had primarily migrated with their husbands try to recapture their identity in their kitchens by showcasing their own cultural identity through the form of blogging. Though studies have been conducted on female food bloggers, I have tried to compare and contrast men and women food bloggers and their perceptions and reflections. The focus was largely concentrated on women food bloggers who are settled in the USA, but male food bloggers were zealous enough to respond and share their thoughts on migrating to the USA and how food blogs have helped them to re-connect with their homelands.

Chapter five explores the changes in dietary habits and norms after migration to the USA. Diasporic food is the crux of my study in the thesis and studying and analyzing the changes in dietary habits has led me to conclude how food bridges the gap between the nation and the Diaspora. This act of restructuring the cultural identities through the cuisine showcases the authentic Indianness which the Diasporic communities try to retain among them and provide the

authenticity to their offspring. My study of authentic cuisine in the Diaspora has tried to claim how Indians attempt to fix their identity while staying away from their homelands.

My thesis is grounded on a number of interviews and shared thoughts by the respondents, who have supported me in the structuring of this thesis which helped me to define the relevance of my arguments. With context of studying the role of women I have interviewed Indian Diaspora residing in the USA, of which most of the populace formed the women. Though I was able to connect with a number of enthusiastic respondents, it was challenging to get in touch with them. The distance created a fuss, as travelling from India to the USA was easier said than done. I had conducted the field work through online survey using technological tools like emails, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Skype and the like. Doing empirical field work with the community in the USA would have given a better understanding of the respondents and their environment, which I was unable to do.

During my online survey, I had interviewed a total of 105 men and women, which includes (food bloggers and the other respondents who detailed me about the food habits in the USA among the diasporic communities). Unfortunately, a sample of 105 Indians in the USA does not reflect the voices of all the Indian American population.

Though a number of studies were conducted on cuisine and how it acts as a major element in driving the cultural identity among the Diaspora, my thesis tried to investigate on the feminine aspect of the study. The fact that women and cuisine go simultaneously, and the domestic kitchens are solely owned by women has a changed perception in the contemporary kitchens of the Diasporic communities. Though the distance and time created a lot of hurdles in the

completion of my survey work, the respondents could reach out to me and share their thoughts on their roles in the kitchens.

Migration has evolved into a public discourse wherein it has become necessary to structure out national or ethnic identity. I have tried to show how cuisine among the diasporic communities has modified its form in response to the cultural and political trends in India, thereby remaking itself into a new form. I have also shown how dietary patterns have changed over the years after migration. Though the Diaspora is always interested in gripping themselves to their age old traditional methods of cooking, the integration of American food in their diet has also come out as a new form of cuisine which is often termed as “fusion food”. Indian food is chiefly divided according to the religious beliefs that are widely followed in a diverse model across India. The varied religious practices offer a number of restrictions and ways of preparing and consuming food. These practices are often strictly followed among the Diasporic communities with a few exceptional cases. These cultural, socio-religious practices which are implemented in eating habits often act as tools to showcase ethnic identity. While I have focused on how the Indian Diasporic communities have stressed on maintaining their eating habits even after migrating to the USA, they have also accredited the flexibility of the cultures that is being maintained in the USA. The USA is known to be a country where many people of various races, class and caste live together, irrespective of maintaining their own cultural practices and beliefs. The Diaspora is often observed to be longing for their homeland and the traditional cuisines, but the salad bowl culture of the USA (as I had mentioned earlier in the thesis) aids them in maintaining the traditions, thereby demarcating the Diasporic Indian identity.

This thesis illustrates on how the identities of women have been contested since the migration of the first woman to the USA to the present set of female migrants. Despite innumerable studies

conducted on the men migrating to the USA, the studies on women came to the forefront. The women began to carve out their identities which were questioned in the host country. They tried to figure out their identities with the culinary idiom which acts as an aiding tool.

The discourse of Diaspora studies is an interdisciplinary one, where researches and studies in this field have integrated fields of history, sociology, anthropology, literature and the like. This thesis has tried to elaborate the cultural and social aspects of food studies in the context of Diaspora studies, where migration has been portrayed to be one of the reasons for the change in dietary habits among the migrants. The integration of food studies with Diaspora studies have brought out an interdisciplinary approach to my research area. As I have tried to question the respondents regarding how rituals and religious practices have influenced their food habits, it has been observed that ritualistic practices are still prevalent in their food habits among the Diaspora. The Diaspora still continue to maintain the practices of savouring food though not in a very strict way, but the quest to maintain their Indian identity in their host lands urges them to maintain the rules and regulations which are also observed in their food habits.

I have also outlined the evolving gender roles in the kitchens and learnt about the equal gender roles in the kitchens in the contemporary times among the Diasporic communities. In the traditional Indian kitchens, a woman has always been observed to be dealing with the household work. With the globalization and changing times, it has also been observed that men have come forward to equally participate in the domestic kitchens. Though this thesis revolves around the cuisine and its changing forms after migration, it does not quite account for the full length of food studies in the Diaspora. In this study, I have tried to concentrate on how cuisine can be an elemental factor to remodel an identity among the Diaspora. This thesis has been grounded to study the ethnic identity which could be framed by the exploration of food ways among the

Indian Diasporic communities residing in the USA. My research findings have fulfilled the objectives of the study and have addressed the research questions raised earlier. This thesis was constructed on an interdisciplinary level, where I integrated the study of literature, primarily by women authors; transnationalism which is prominently shown through the art of blogging by women bloggers, the study of historical facts and stories of migration and the changes in dietary habits and gender roles in the kitchens of the Diasporic communities. Migration and cuisine being the key words and concepts in this study, the process of how food bears an eternal cultural significance in the lives of the Diaspora have gained prominence in my study.

Scope of study

The Diasporic community is often characterized with multi-dimensional factors and it is often identified with the negotiating identities of the community. The assimilation of food studies with the Diaspora studies has tried to provide a different angle to the thesis, whereas further scholarship can be taken up to investigate the further glimpse into the lives of the different sections of women in the diasporic communities and their questions of identity, cultural representations, their history, their lives and the like. Research on elderly women in the Diaspora maybe taken up for future research since there is a paucity of literature on this issue. The problems faced by elderly women in the Diaspora are a serious social concern which needs to be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective. Lastly, policies need to be formulated to help the elderly women in the Diaspora by the host country as well as by the country of origin.

The Indian-American women (generally the food bloggers, you tubers and the like) have also confessed that though they like the art of blogging, and it has also become a source of income, this was not the job that they intended to do after migration. With the unavailability of work

visas for housewives, many of my respondents have confessed that they adhered to the art of blogging. Work visa should also be provided to the dependant women to work in the host countries. As the host country and their socio-cultural environment differs from their homeland, orientation and workshops may be conducted to the new migrants by their ethnic associations such as Bengali association of Southern California, Telugu Association of Greater Chicago, North American Manipur Association, Houston Tamil Sangam, USA and the like. In case of emergencies, leaders from each ethnic association in every city may attempt to reach out to the new migrant women and alert them about non-profit organizations and provide help line numbers for victims of domestic abuse, violence or for any kind of emergencies.

Researches and studies on Diaspora have been the primary focus in the thesis. The study of women has also found its appropriate place in this study, where the contested identities of the women in the Diasporic communities have been carved out in the thesis.

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Annexure

Questionnaire SET I

Food blogging in the Diaspora

Dear Respondent,

Good day! I, Sinorita Mazumder, would like to extend my warm wishes from India. I am a Ph.d research scholar at University of Hyderabad, India, working on the culinary culture of the Indian Diaspora. The questionnaire below is dedicated to conduct a survey on food blogs. Through this brief survey, I would like to figure out some of the concepts related to food blogging. I would also like to declare that your response would solely be used for academic purposes and for no other reasons. I would also like to mention that your name as a blogger would only be revealed with your consent, otherwise not.

For any kind of query, feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and suggestions.

Regards,

Sinorita

sinorita.mazumder@gmail.com

8978835715

7980311157

* Required

1. Your name *

2. Your age group *

- 20-30 years

- 31-40 years
 - 41-50 years
 - 51-60 years
 - 61-70 years
 - Other:
3. Sex *
- Female
 - Male
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other:
4. Year of migration
5. Span of stay in U.S.A
6. When and why did you start blogging? *
7. Name of your blog. (E-mail address and other sites to connect you with.) *
8. Do you believe in connecting with your own culture through blogging? *
9. Do you follow other blogs? *
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
10. Describe your blogging style. (Blogging details, frequency of blogging) *
11. Purpose of blogging. *
12. Can you name some of your favourite bloggers and why you follow them? *
13. What motivates you to continue with food blogging? *
15. What are your favourite regional cuisines?

16. When you first arrived in this country, did you find cooking an authentic dish not very easy due to lack of appropriate ingredients?

17. How did you cope up with the situation if you had any?

18. Do you recollect your lost memories through the recipes that you re-create in your kitchens?
*

19. Do you think you can identify yourself with your homeland and construct a new identity for yourself with food blogging? *

20. How does your family respond to the authentic dishes that you cook and serve?

21. The kitchen has always been a female- dominated arena in India. Though times have changed and men have also entered the kitchen, women are still observed to handle the reigns of the kitchen. What would be your take on the statement? *

22. Talking about some gendered issues, it has generally been observed that women are frequent food bloggers in the diaspora. Do you think they are much more into constructing their own identities through blogging in the diaspora? *

23. Are your blogs spontaneous or some kind of planning goes into them? *

24. Out of all the cooking methods, which one is your favourite?

25. Your early memories of food. *

26. To wrap up, some general questions.

- Favourite ingredient to cook with. *
- Favourite pick-up dish
- One recipe that you've inherited and it's your favourite *
- Do you maintain the same procedure that has been practiced earlier to prepare the recipe or you have customized it in your own way? *

27. Any other information/ comments/ observation.

Questionnaire SET II

Culinary Culture of the Indian Diaspora

Dear Respondent,

I, Sinorita Mazumder, would like to extend my warm wishes from India. I am a Ph.D research scholar at University of Hyderabad, India, working on the Culinary Culture of the Indian Diaspora. The questionnaire below is dedicated to conduct a survey on some of the dietary habits practiced by the diaspora. Through this brief survey, I would like to figure out some of the concepts related to rituals affecting the dietary habits. I hereby declare that your responses would solely be used for academic purposes and no other means. I would also like to mention that your name as a respondent would only be revealed with your consent, otherwise not.

For any kind of query, feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and suggestions.

Regards,

Sinorita

sinorita.mazumder@gmail.com

8978835715/ 7980311157

* Required

Email address *

1. Your name *
2. Your age group *
 - ☐ 0-20 years
 - ☐ 21-30 years
 - ☐ 31-40 years
 - ☐ 41-50 years
 - ☐ 51-60 years
 - ☐ 61-100 years
3. Your gender *
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male

- ☐ Prefer not to say
 - ☐ Other
- 4. Reason of migration
- 5. Your mother tongue *
- 6. Are you a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian? *
 - ☐ Vegetarian
 - ☐ Non-Vegetarian
 - ☐ Other:
- 7. Are you an NRI or POI? *
 - ☐ NRI
 - ☐ POI
 - ☐ Other:
- 8. Your duration of stay in U.S.A
- 9. Are you married? *
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 10. Age group of your spouse
 - ☐ 21-30 Years
 - ☐ 31-40 years
 - ☐ 41-50 years
 - ☐ 51-60 years
 - ☐ 61-100 years
- 11. Your spouse's gender
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
- 12. Is your spouse vegetarian or non-vegetarian?
 - ☐ Vegetarian
 - ☐ non-vegetarian
 - ☐ Other:
- 13. The duration of stay of your spouse in U.S.A
- 14. Your spouse's religion

15. Number of family members in your house *
16. Your native place in India *
17. Which language do you generally speak in your house? *
18. How do you rate your children on speaking your mother tongue? *
- Excellent
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Not good
19. How often do you visit your place of religious worship? *
- Once in a month
 - More than once in a month
 - Less than once in a month
 - Other
20. Does food consumption in the family get affected by religious occasions/rituals?*
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
21. What kind of religious practices do you follow at home?
22. Does the food consumption of your family vary on certain auspicious days of the week?
If, any please mention those.*
23. Please specify some of the religious festivals you celebrate. Along with this, please mention some of the food practices that you generally observe on the auspicious days of the festival and why. *
24. Which is the one meal that you and your family members sit together and eat? *
- Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Dinner
 - Evening snacks
 - Other
25. What is the general breakfast menu at home?*
26. What was your general breakfast menu when you used to reside in India?*

27. What is the general lunch menu at home?*
28. What was the general lunch menu you used to have when you resided in India?*
29. What is the general dinner menu at home?*
30. What was the general dinner menu that you used to have when you resided in India?*
31. What are the different non-Indian food habits that you have adopted while living in the U.S?*
32. Do you maintain any kind of restrictions on eating? If any, please state the restricted food item and the reason behind it.*
33. What are the Indian spices and vegetables that you find difficult in buying in the Indian markets in U.S?*
34. Who, in your family cooks the most? *
35. Do you think your cooking differs from the authentic dishes that used to be served while you were in India? *
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
36. Do you think cooking and consuming Indian food makes you identify with your nation of origin? *
37. What are the basic differences that you observe between Indian cuisine and your current residence's local cuisine? *
38. Do you generally use your hands to eat with? *
39. Do you use modern techniques and methods to cook or do you like to stick on to the age old traditions maintained in India? *
40. If your dietary habits involve a lot of rituals, could you please elaborate on the significance of these rituals? *
41. Have you maintained the ritualistic practices while cooking in your adopted country as it is maintained in your homeland? *
42. Do you follow the same rituals involved in eating as you used to observe in India?*
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

43. Do you follow a strong bond of attachment to your country of origin through food? *
44. Lastly, food is supposed to play an important factor in articulating identity and longing for home in the Diaspora. How would you respond to this statement? *
45. Any other comments/ observations/ suggestions
46. Many studies have observed that food and women are knitted together in the kitchen. What would be your views on the same? *
47. Any other comments/ suggestions.

Culinary Culture of the Indian Diaspora: A Study of Women and their identity in the United States of America

by Sinorita Mazumder

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