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Indian Diasporic Identity Explored through Reel and Real Space

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Abstract

Through the medium of selected Indian Diasporic cinema, the research envisages to explore the Indian Diasporic Identity for the migrant individual. Amongst its multifaceted identities—cultural, social, gendered, historical, religious, political, national and now transnational, the Indian Diaspora has encompassed various modes of Identity construction. The Indian Diaspora imprints its unique yet hybrid identity on places that it occupies, initiating such places to act as catalysts of Identity construction.

Focusing on three selected Diasporic films—*Bend it Like Beckham, Mississippi Masala* and *The Namesake*, I seek to follow the lives of the characters that represent the Indian migrant individual. The reel spaces along with the real space synergistically assert the boundaries of culture, class, gender and nation. The heteronormative structures that are often associated with the Indian Identity shall also be questioned and critiqued. The discussion shall be supported by postcolonial discourse on migration, Diaspora and transnationalism. It is argued that the medium of Diasporic cinema expresses, creates, represents and sometimes shatters the existing identities.

This research, thus, is intended to suggest possible trends and point to future research directions.
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This is for you G ji
Motivation of the Author

The way the Indian Diaspora has functioned as one single entity is both fascinating and intriguing to me. I came to the United States, a couple of years back and it was the first time that I attempted to live away from my country and its people. Being in a foreign space with foreign ways of life, I unconsciously began creating my own comfort zone. I was suddenly more interested in the Indian food, the clothing, and the Indian language(s). I was conscientiously browsing for websites, radio and television stations that might provide Indian programs. I connected with my country and its culture not only through the mass media delegating news but also through films and music. A trip to the Indian grocery store and restaurant was a high point in life.

Spatially, I decorated my house with Indian handicrafts and the aroma would often be filled with spices and incenses. Hence, at a micro level, I did succeed in ‘re-creating’ a space that was personal and connected me, to some extent, to my home-place.

At a macro level, I was pleasantly surprised to see an existence of a parallel Indian culture, thousands of miles away from India. This was my first introduction to the flourishing Indian Diaspora that functions thousands of miles away from India, yet in its innate ways, connects every individual to her homeland. A subsequent visit to
Oak Tree Road in Edison, New Jersey, United States followed by a trip to Southhall, London, United Kingdom deepened my interest in such Indian ethnic enclaves.

The presence of invisible spatial and cultural boundaries that differentiated the mainstream western culture from such Indian ethnic enclaves fascinated me. From my own personal journey, I was able to identify with the visual and literary media portraying the struggles and joys of the Indian Diaspora. Feature films that had been merely a source of entertainment, began to reveal more depth—every shot, every dialogue, every character had a story to tell. The more I learnt the background of Diasporic film making, the more this topic intrigued me. Thus, the construction of a space that boasts of Indianness and acts as a catalyst in sustaining the cultural Identity of its people, became the focus of my study. Exploration of this real space, which has been captured in a cinematic reel, is the story of this current research.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The “beyond” is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past.... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years, but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the “beyond”: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-dela—here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth.

—Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 1994, 1
Through the study of a select Indian Diasporic cinema, this thesis explores the concept of Diasporic places. Albeit fictional, the narratives of Indian immigrants nevertheless reveal how they perceive themselves and their environment. The research also explores the interstitial and liminality of Indian Diasporic Identity from the perspective of postcolonial and transnational studies.

On the surface, an ethnic immigrant space belonging to any post-war\(^1\) developed country screams of cultural differences and an indifference towards the mainstream culture, giving rise to a miniature city within a city. However on taking a closer look, one can see that this space is the cauldron of identity struggles between the broader mainstream culture and the culture from the immigrant’s homeland. The reluctance to give up an old identity and embrace a new one often results in the formation of subcultures, that on the surface resist the mainstream but gradually take the form of a hybrid culture. This continuous negotiation is often fuelled by ethnocentrism resulting in adulation for pastiche cultural sentiments and a total disconnect with the present. Diasporic spaces thus reveal the sentiments and choices of its immigrant residents. The choices, to a great extent, are the result of the experiences and personal narratives of these individuals— their journeys both geographical and metaphorical in nature.

\(^1\) Here post-war refers to post World War II first world countries.
Diasporic Cinema is a medium that encapsulates the stories of these people and thus in a way mimics real life. The stories are made complex by the notion of transient identities and social structures. Diasporas do not emerge out of a sudden rupture but have the qualities of dislocation and displacement. The spaces that come to be inhabited by the Diaspora are often hybrid and multicultural in nature. Hybridity, which becomes a part of the émigré, also transcends in such liminal spaces that get occupied. Hybridity is a term used by postcolonial scholars to signify the immigrant’s sense of displacement and dislocation, and fragmentation of identities; often resulting

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2 There are four ‘ideal types’ of institutional arrangements by which immigrants are invariably incorporated into the host country (Tambiah 2000, Modood 2005, Shani 2008). These are assimilation, exclusion, integration and the much talked about multiculturism. Multiculturism highlights issues relating to the recognition of difference within plural societies whilst holding them together as viable politics. Glazer and Meynihan (1975) suggest that assimilation resembles the concept of ‘melting pot’, as seen in capitalistic societies such as United States of 1970. Immigrants in such societies were expected to take the initiative in adapting to a de-ethnicized market or secular culture. Exclusion involves the participation or incorporation of migrant only into the selected and marked off sectors of the host society, as in Germany and Japan. Both assimilation and exclusion function independently of the state and majority community. On the other hand, integration can be described as a ‘two way’ process of social interaction where the members of the state and majority community work along with the ethno cultural minority in order to facilitate the emergence of an integrated society. Multiculturism differs from integration as it signifies the ‘social reality’ of ethno cultural groups, not just of individuals and organizations. Modood (2005) points out that this reality can emerge out of a sense of solidarity with people of similar origins or faiths or mother tongue. Philosophically, it is based on the premise that we are all ‘cultural beings’, born and raised within a thick culture, which we no doubt can revise and even reject but only by embracing some other culture (Parekh 2002, 141). Politically, multiculturism involves active state policies that are designed to accommodate immigrants in their host market through equal opportunities, legislation that grants full access to social services, education and housing and finally, access to citizenship.
in spaces inhabited by Diasporic communities. Bhabha (1994) posits that it is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference, that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.

There are recurring themes that surface in Indian Diasporic Cinema. The common themes are often woven around the issue of nostalgia towards the untainted motherland, resentment towards a lost Culture, holding on to pastiche culture, alienation and sense of otherness in a foreign land, racial tension, generation gap, and Identity struggles. However, of all the complexities that bind the lives of Indian immigrants, there are certain elements that act as agents of reconnecting the Indian immigrant to his/her homeland. Apart from Indian ethnic food, music and arts; Indian cinema (in national and regional languages) to a large extent helps in establishing this relationship.

3 Hybridity is a complex term that is used a lot in postcolonial scholarship as a way of referring to the sense of displacement experienced by the immigrants. However, its racist connotations, showing its use in erasing histories of colonial violence and cultural appropriation have also been brought forth. See Robert Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (New York: Routledge, 1995); John Hutnyk, The Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry (London: Pluto, 2000). For this research, however, I shall follow the postcolonial scholarship while using the term Hybridity.

4 As in cultural values, tradition, customs, art forms, world view from the motherland that seemed so pristine when compared to the new lifestyle adopted in the host land.
1.1. Diasporic cinema: A tool for exploring Diasporic Identity

The personal stories or narratives of the immigrants reflect their choices and struggles. Cinema acts as a medium of transferring these narratives in the form of moving images. Hence, cinema acts as an effective tool for exploring the Indian Diasporic identity, and the role that it plays in creating a larger identity construct, that is continuously negotiating between time, space and cultures.

Diasporic films portray life stories of migrant individuals, the representation of their homeland; and help to preserve and cultivate the original culture and language. Feature films, as a medium of visual culture, act as a way to broadcast the immigrant’s way of life. It is argued that scenes of places in feature films woven around the Diaspora are efforts to represent the culture and Identity of its inhabitants.

The importance of Indian Diasporic Cinema as a lens to look at the lives of Indian immigrants is further affirmed by the place it holds in their lives. It transcends its role of providing purely entertainment value, by functioning as a medium for immigrants to relive their lives that they left behind in the homeland. As suggested by Desai (2004) in the study of the South Asian cinema—cinema provides a site of investigation in these negotiations not only because it is widely accessible, but also because of its engagements with globalization through circulation.
According to Desai (2004), cinema reaches tens, if not hundreds of millions of viewers. She further states that the film medium has played a pivotal role in the formation of South-Asian Diasporic cultures, partially because of its key role in South Asia itself. The film and culture industry participates in (re)presenting the homeland to the diaspora in a supposedly one-way relationship in which dominant cultural narratives are produced in the homeland and passively consumed by the diaspora.  

With mass globalization, Indian Diasporic cinema also acts as a commodity that is consumed by people living both in India as well as other parts of the world. The shrinking of national boundaries allows Diasporic film makers to connect to a larger audience, allowing flow of commerce, ideas and culture between India and its diaspora.

Taking Diasporic cultural politics into consideration, it can be seen that there is a negotiation between the nation-state policies and commercial film industries. The particular ways in which the feature length popular films are produced and circulated are greatly affected by the way they are consumed in the public sphere of the Indian Diaspora. With the advent of technology, the popular and public spheres of Diasporic cultural production, constituting films, can be made accessible to newer communities.

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According to Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989), the term ‘public culture’ is more than a rubric for collectively thinking about aspects of modern life, but it allows us to hypothesize not a type of cultural phenomena but a zone of cultural debate. Therefore, instead of classifying a genre or a target audience, public culture is concerned with complex relations between multiple groups and interests in the dominant and popular space of diaspora. Public culture, therefore, is a site of contestation of class and other interests, often articulated through the production of differences in terms of power relations. Additionally, public culture, not limited by a nation, gets negotiated in cultural discourses across political, social and economic spaces.

Desai (2004) claims that it is imperative to understand that even though one presupposes a space of shared cultural discourse, different groups may not participate in the public cultures associated with the feature length popular films (such as the ones studied in the current research). Therefore, transnational public cultures focused on migratory subjectivities often foreclose the politics of subalternity in their imbricated relationship with global capitalism.

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7 Ibid, 9.
Diasporic films, according to Desai (2004) provide comfort or familiarity as emblems of national homeland culture. Cinema, thus, contributes to the processes of Diasporic identity formation and contributes to the formation of Indian subjectivity.

The Diaspora, as proposed by Shukla (2003), is an ever changing entity that doesn’t have a specific form or structure. As the Indian Diaspora evolves, Indian Diasporic Cinema also takes on various shapes and forms. Through the frames of a feature film, one can witness the lives and identities of the people, as it unfolds and evolves. The collective identity of Diaspora as represented in the Diasporic Cinema is often the subject of debate and criticism. Naficy (2001), on the authorship of Accented or Diasporic cinema claims that such cinema is both authorial and autobiographical.

The post colonial ethnic and identity film makers are both ethnic and Diasporic; since some of them are either immigrant or been born since the 1960’s to non-white non-western post-colonial émigrés. Thus their relationship to the place creates a different kind of cinema. Naficy (2001) proposes that in Diasporic cinema, there is a vertical

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8 Accented Cinema, as proposed by Naficy (2001), refers to a kind of cinema that has emerged in the post 1960s era of film making, where the cinematic production takes place in one country and maybe viewed in another—resulting in a diverse mode of cultural production. This kind of cinema is often produced by filmmakers that are part of a diaspora or are in exile. The displacement and dislocation experienced by the filmmaker often transcends into an authorial and autobiographical narrative of the films. “Accented filmmakers are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they also are empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, which exist outside and prior to their films.” (Naficy 2001, 4). Accented cinema is not a cohesive or established cinema as such, since it is in a state of preformation and emergence in disparate and dispersed pockets across the globe. “If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that Diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented.” (Naficy 2001, 4).
relationship to the homeland and also a lateral relationship to the Diasporic communities and experiences. He further suggests that the post-colonial ethnic and identity cinema can be encoded in the “politics of hyphen”\(^9\). This can be understood as the emergence of hyphenated terms such as African-American, Latino-American, and Asian-American.

The hyphen may imply the lack, or the idea that hyphenated people are somehow subordinate to unhyphenated people, or that they are “equal but not quite”, or that they will never be totally accepted or trusted as full citizens. In its nativist adoption, the hyphen provides vertical links that emphasize descent relations, roots, depth, inheritance, continuity, homogeneity, and stability.\(^10\)

The politics of location in the Accented cinema is complicated by the desire of the ethnic community to distinguish between insiders and outsiders. This binarism is the subject of debates and ambiguity as the hybrids who occupy interstitial and multiple

\(^9\) The politics of hyphen emerges from the Diasporic sentiment of retaining identifications from the homeland as well as the host land. Even if an individual moves from one country to another and acquires a new citizenship, the sense of national belonging (towards homeland) cannot be necessarily taken away. As a result, it is observed in the United States, the bipartite, hyphenated identities of some nationals such as Indo-Americans, Asian-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Polish-Americans; express such intention of retention or carryover. In such cases, the “Indo/Indian”, “Asian”, “Italian”, “Polish” indicates a desire to retain the previous national identity which is regarded as cultural or ethnic.

\(^10\) Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 16. In context of the Indian ethnic identity, the Indo-American experience is highlighted in Piyush D. Pandya’s film *American Desi*. The story focuses on the identity conflicts of an American born son to a first generation Indian immigrant family. Through the course of the entire film, the protagonist comes up with ways of avoiding his Indian heritage. He is mocked by his fellow university students (from India) as being an American Born Confused Desi (ABCD), the term essentially refers to first or second generation American children/people of Indian origin who seem to be struggling with their cultural and ethnic identity. Thus the fragmented and hybridized identity of the Indo-American protagonist reflects the experience of many second generation immigrants.
spaces of identity and cultures are often criticized for crossing the boundaries of insiders and outsiders.

Mira Nair, being an independent filmmaker from India, is an important contributor to the collective Indian identity and Diaspora and to the Indian cinema. Nair’s *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) illustrates the ambiguity of collective identity of an insider who makes films about insiders’ own native culture. A number of Indian scholars and reviewers, both inside and outside India, criticized *Salaam Bombay!* by contending that its “realistic” depiction of the desperate lives of young subaltern girls and boys living in the streets, brothels and detention centers of Bombay (Mumbai) was an outsiders “fantasy”.¹¹ Nair was criticized for her privileged upbringing in India, her higher education in a leading American university, and her being a part of an elite Diasporic population. Some insiders also criticized her work for not presenting a “good” India or the whole of India to outsiders. The film’s realism came about through cross cultural viewing, which positioned a fictional film made in one cultural context to be screened in another culture as if it were a documentary.

American fictional films, for example, are routinely read by audiences in other countries not only as fictional stories, but also as documentaries of the American way of life, culture, and values (“this is the way the United States looks; this is how Americans behave, work, and play”). These factors made the authenticity, authoritativeness, and realism of Nair’s view (the insider) so compelling that

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American mainline reviewers (outsiders) spoke of Salaam Bombay!’s “documentary feel”. A native reviewer (insider) criticized it for its “fabricated realism” and “insidious humanism”.

Summarizing the critiques of Salaam Bombay!, Naficy (2001) suggests that the current globalization and deterritorialization have made Nair’s films part of the cultural identity of Indians everywhere.

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13 Although Nair is an independent film director from India and not a member of an Asian or other filmmaking collectives, she is nonetheless an important contributor both to the collective Indian Identity in Diaspora and to the Indian cinema. Nair’s depiction of the Indian Diaspora and its struggles is a result of her own personal experiences as an intercultural filmmaker. Referring to her multicultural and hybridized perspective, Nair claims, “As a brown person, between black and white, I could move between these worlds very comfortably because I was neither” (quoted in Foster 1997, 111). Nair’s documentaries, feature films, and books show her deep interest in the lives of social outcasts and liminals. She states that she has always been drawn to stories of people who live on the margins of society; people who are on the edge, or outside, learning the language of being in-between; dealing with the question, ‘What, and where is home?’ In the director’s statement about the movie The Namesake, Nair states,

“I wanted to return to making a small-scale, intimate and mobile film, one which is extraordinarily close to my own reality as a South Asian person living in America today. Jhumpa Lahiri, the great Pulitzer-prize winning writer of “Interpreter of Maladies”, has written precisely such a tale in her debut novel, The Namesake, which is this film. It encompasses, in a deep humane way, the tale of millions of us who have left one home for another, who have known what it is to combine the old ways with the new world, who have left the shadow of our parents to find ourselves for the first time. I long to see my own people through my camera, one that will move fluidly between New York and Calcutta.”
1.2. Research Outline

Dividing the research into prominent themes, I shall look at three Diasporic films and explore the identity of the Indian migrant subject as represented in these films. The themes depict the spatial as well as the psychological space of the individual; presenting the physical as well as the metaphorical aspect of an individual’s journey from his homeland to his adopted place of residence.

To understand the origins of the Indian Diaspora, I first investigate its historical underpinnings—how it came to being; what factors influenced its emergence. Chapter Two gives the historical background of the Indian Diaspora. It traces the emergence of the Diaspora from the early history, which here is defined as the colonial and pre-independence era prior to the emergence of the nation state of India in 1947. It then follows the post 1965 immigration reforms in the United States which attracted highly skilled professionals from India. The chapter also looks at the current status of Indian immigration, in the backdrop of recent mass globalization.

Next, in order to locate issues pertaining to Identity and Place in the Indian Diaspora, I look at three Diasporic feature films, the first being, Bend it Like Beckham (2002) by London based filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, and the other two being Mississippi Masala (1992) and The Namesake (2006), both by Mira Nair, who is based out of New
York. Although the three feature films boast of different storylines, they share a common theme of being based on the lives of Indian immigrants who are in search of their cultural identity and negotiating their spatial as well as social boundaries.

Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) looks at the conflict of tradition and cultural issues faced by second generation\(^\text{14}\) Indians living in London. The storyline deals with an Indian family from Kenya who has migrated to England. The children of this family are expected to abide by certain social norms, prescribed behavior and follow the Indian culture in terms of clothing, food, music and language. Also, many issues pertaining to place, gender, religion and culture surface through the narrative, exposing the complex array of identity constructs that go into an immigrant life.

Tying together the emergence and subsequent expulsion of the Indian Diaspora from Africa, *Mississipi Masala* (1992) by Mira Nair explores the clash of political agenda and a sense of belonging for one’s adopted homeland. It is a story of a Ugandan family of Indian origin that has migrated to United States after the forced expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972 under the regime of General Idi Amin. The film explores the issues of racial and cultural affiliation amongst Indian immigrants from India and Uganda. It also touches upon the issue of color and race which on the surface binds all

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\(^{14}\) “First generation” refers to people who migrated on their own; and “second generation” refers to those that were born and raised in the Diaspora.
‘men of color’; but exposes deeper fragmentation when issues of communal identity and culture take precedence over human values.

Taking a more contemporary take on the identity crisis faced by Indian immigrants, Mira Nair’s *The Namesake* (2006) focuses on the struggles faced by a Bengali family from India. The film, whose screenplay has been adapted from a novel—*The Namesake* by Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri, integrates the Bengali culture and compares and contrasts the geographical and metaphorical spaces occupied by the characters. Nostalgia forms the back bone of this immigrant story; however, it is expressed through the struggles and pain of the female protagonist. Emphasizing the sense of alienation and unfamiliarity experienced by the female protagonist, the film’s narrative intersperses the storyline from the back lanes of Kolkata, India to the streets of Cambridge, Massachusetts. This film captures the establishment of this family in the United States in the post 1965 era, following the immigration reforms in the United States.16

Focusing on the above Diasporic feature films, I shall explore the spatial determinants such as the sense of place, identity of place determined through

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16 For further information, see Appendix A.
insideness and outsideness, nostalgia towards a place, image of a place and creation of Identity through spatial narratives or place stories.

1.3. Reasons for choosing the three films

The three films represent the various facets of immigrant life and resonate with multiple identities that represent an Indian individual living outside India. I have deliberately chosen the films by filmmakers of Indian origin as it is argued that the Diasporic cinema to some extent, expresses the personal identity struggles and concerns of the filmmakers, thus adding to the authenticity of the story. Also, as a source of putting forward the opinions and sentiments of the Indian Diasporic community, films turn into a medium of furthering this around the world. Another aspect of choosing Diasporic cinema is the rapid globalization that has affected the cinematic medium. Films that depict the lives of the Diasporic community are able to connect the audience of the mother country to that of the host country.

The depiction of the Indian people in these feature films is varied depending on their place of residence. By looking at these three selected feature films, one can estimate the complex parameters that go into the emergence of a Diaspora as well as its current relationship with the motherland. Although the personal struggles of people
belonging to the Indian Diaspora may share certain commonalities, the overall characteristics of the Diaspora may vastly vary contingent on where the Diaspora is located. For example, the Indian Diaspora in United Kingdom or its previous held colonies is very different in its history as well as development, to the one that emerged in United States. The place of residence and emergence, thus, greatly affects the relationship between the mother country—India to its Diaspora.

1.4. Relevance of Spatial Stories

Stories and Narratives act as means of transferring culture from one generation to another. Cinema, acts as an important link in furthering the culture and ways of life. It not only acts as a story teller through the characters that it encapsulates but also as a mirror of the Identity of the people.

The Indian immigrant also carries with him the inherited folklores, stories and narratives that describe the homeland as the individual perceived it to be. These spatial stories, that travel with him, act in the formation of an image of the homeland which often times remains untainted through the passage of time. In the creation of Indian Diasporic spaces, both in real life and reel life; the spatial stories act as transmitters of
Culture and Identity. They project the needs and desire of the immigrants, of how the Indian Diaspora thinks, acts and projects itself.

It is noteworthy to see how the story can be approached not as a pure narration of events, fiction or nonfiction, but as a travel story—metaphorai or even a spatial practice. Spatial practices, according to Certeau (2002), are part of everyday tactics, from the alphabet of spatial indication, “It is to the right, Take a left”; the beginning of a story, the rest of which is written by footsteps; to the daily “news”, television news reports, legends and stories that are told (memories and fiction of foreign lands or more or less distant times in the past). Therefore, stories or folklores can be defined as a string that connects different spaces and converts them into places. It may also be stated that such spatial narratives act as a mode to connect different timelines and allow ideas to flow from one temporal level to another.17

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17 Further explicating the concept of a Space, Certeau states that a space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Summing this, he deduces space as a practiced place. The concepts of place and space are very important to understand as they lay the foundation of understanding everyday spaces. What do every day or ordinary spaces constitute of? There are several parameters that act in the formation and the functioning of an ordinary space. The shopping districts, for example, fall into the category of everyday ordinary space as their character is volatile. Even though such spaces follow a definite code of action, yet their variables are constantly changing. The specific way a place is used is determined by its users and its function. In the case ethnic or Diasporic enclaves, the shopping districts, not only act as a mercantile space but also a platform to exchange culture and social activities. Therefore, the variables in such places are aplenty and they do merge and fragment continuously. It is like a continuous flux of different elements that get fused into one to bring out a distinct flavor of a place.
The experiences and struggles faced by the Indian immigrant in the Indian Diaspora give rise to spatial narratives. They extend much beyond a linear transit from one place to another—they traverse the boundaries of nations and people. The journey, both physical and metaphorical, places the migrant into an interstitial realm that looks forward to the new (host, new identity, way of life) but simultaneously looks back at the old (home, tradition, home culture) as a point of reference to adapt to the new life.
Chapter 2: Historical Narrative of the Indian Diaspora

I have lived that moment of the scattering of people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering in the half-life, half light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also, the gathering of people in the Diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status—the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man. The gathering of clouds from which the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish asks ‘Where should the birds fly after the last sky?’

—Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 1994, 199
2.1. The Emergence of the Diaspora

The term ‘Diaspora’ originally referred to the dispersion of the Greeks after the destruction of the city of Aegina, to the exile of the Jews from Babylon, and also to the Armenians after Persian and Turkish invasions and expulsion in the mid-sixteenth century (Naficy 2001). Although the classic paradigm of Diaspora has involved Jews but Peters (1999), Cohen (1997), Tololyan (1996), Clifford (1997, 244-77), Naficy (1993a), and Safran (1991) have argued that the definition of Diaspora should not be limited to the dispersion of the Jews, as throughout history, there have been sustained dispersions of people from various backgrounds; such massive dispersions can be seen happening even today.18 The term has been taken up by other displaced peoples, among them

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18 For more discussions on the definition of Diasporas, See Khachig Tololyan, “The Nation-State and its others: In Lieu of a Preface,” in Diaspora vol. 1, no. 1, 1991 and William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth and Homeland and Return,” in Diaspora vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, 83-99. Robin Cohen in Global Diasporas: An Introduction (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) categorizes the Diasporas on the basis of: victim, labor, trade, imperial and cultural. In “Diasporas in Modern Societies”, William Safran (1991,84-85) defines diasporas sharing several of the following characteristics: 1. Dispersal of a “people” from an original “center” to two or more peripheral or foreign regions, 2. The presence of a collective memory or myth about the homeland, 3. A belief that the Diasporic people cannot be fully accepted into the hostile host society, 4. The homeland as true, ideal home to which the Diaspora should eventually return when conditions are acceptable, 5. A commitment to the maintenance and restoration of the homeland, and 6. A continuing relationship with the homeland and a sense of ethnonational consciousness.
African-Caribbeans in England, to describe their abduction from their African homes and their forced dispersion to the new world (Gilroy 1993, Hall 1988).\textsuperscript{19}

However in the present day, this dispersion may arise due to people seeking better economic opportunities; displaced people due to ethnic conflicts in their homeland, or even stateless people having a desire for a homeland yet to come (Naficy 2001). Kachig Toloyan (1996), editor of the journal \textit{Diaspora}, traced the genealogy of the term Diaspora and observed that the term is no longer limited in describing the migrations of the Jewish populations. He attributes the expanding usage of this term partly to the increase of immigration to the industrialized world, to the lack of assimilation for many immigrant groups, to their institutional links with the homeland, to their work to create and maintain their own religious institutions, language schools, community centers, newspapers, and radio stations, and to the American university itself, where many Diaspora elites have converged to forge theoretical sites to address immigrant identity and transnationalism\textsuperscript{20}. Also, with the increase in travel, media and


\textsuperscript{20} Transnationalism, according to Jigna Desai (2004), emphasizes the movement across nation states and simultaneously implies a state of change as well; it interrogates understandings of the national and transnational through critiques offered by postcolonial, globalization, and Diasporic studies. Saskia Sassen (2003, 5) comments, “Crucial to the critique of methodological nationalism is the need for transnationalism because the nation as container category is inadequate given the proliferation of transboundary dynamics and formation.”
communication technology, more and more immigrants can be considered to be living in Diasporas.

James Clifford (1997) offers a lateral position to the concept of Diaspora. According to Clifford, lateral and de-centered connections are as important as those formed around teleology of origin/return. Thus, unlike a singular origin involving a compelled dispersion of people, Diaspora may also include a shared ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation or resistance. The Indian Diaspora that emerged in East Africa originally came into being when the British Empire brought indentured laborers from the Indian subcontinent to build railroads in some of the Eastern African nations such as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. But with the formation of independent African nation states and their subsequent new political regimes, the Indian population was expelled from some of these countries to form pure African states. This forced expulsion resulted in the scattering of people of Indian origin to parts of United Kingdom and United States. The Indian Diaspora, thus, experienced a multiple form of movement—that from the original homeland (India) to African states, and then to other parts of the West.

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21 For further reading, see Ramchandani, R.R, Ugandan Asians: The End of an enterprise (Bombay: United Asia, 1974).
2.2. The Indian Diaspora

The Indian Diaspora, as suggested by postcolonial discourses, is a space where possibilities of a heterogeneous Britain, United States, and India meet. Immanuel Wallerstein refers to this pluralistic formation of society as the construction of peoplehood.\textsuperscript{22} Avtar Brah (1996)\textsuperscript{23} states that, “The concept of Diaspora concerns historically variable forms of \textit{relationality} within and between Diasporic formations.” She further states that “Diaspora specifies a matrix of economic, political and cultural inter-relationships which construct the commonality between the various components of a dispersed group and delineates a field of identifications where ‘imagined communities’ are forged within and out of a confluence of narratives.”

The people constituting the Diaspora build imagined communities by negotiating boundaries and recreating identities. The postwar period (post 1945), of roughly fifty years, in which Indianness has become locally visible and recognized, has been one which has witnessed quite dramatic transformations in the world: massive movements of people, the unfolding consequences of colonialism and postcolonialism, new forms of diversity in all nation-states, and transitions from largely industrial to


largely service-based global economies. In dissolving the distinctions between “real” and “imaginary” communities, and “individual” and “collective” identities, (Etienne) Balibar is able to capture how all sorts of identifications are historically produced and felt. National belonging may underlie Indianness, but that organizing principle becomes more heterogeneous as it maps onto other forms of identification in Diaspora, and even becomes a newly constitutive category of other national frameworks, like America or England. The Indian subject traverses the boundary of being only Indian


25 Sandhya Shukla, India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 7. The idea of hegemonic nations as ideologically constructed or “imagined communities” is most famously elaborated by Benedict Anderson who, in the early 1980s, theorized, the emergence of the modern nation out of the nationalist revolutions that took place throughout the Americas in the late 18th and 19th centuries. As Anderson (1983,19) argues, nations are brought into being by peoples whose access to print culture enables collective imagination of involvement in a political and cultural project that extends back into a “immemorial past” and “glides into a limitless future”. For further reading, See Benedict, Anderson, “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism”.

26 The term Indianness holds ambiguous meanings. The sense of national belonging is often juxtaposed by culture and tradition. In a study conducted on a group of Indian immigrants living in Connecticut by Sunil Bhatia (2001), the understanding of the term ‘Indianness’ by the participants was pinned on the issues of following religious customs, traditions and things that were considered morally superior to the western way of life.

to adopting the new identity of being American or British and forming an intermediate classification of being called American-Indian or British-Indian.28

Diasporas consciously attempt to maintain (real and /or imagined) connections and commitments to their homeland as well as to recognize themselves and act as a collective community.29 Hence, people who live outside their ancestral homeland do not automatically form a part of the Diaspora.30 The non-European/non white Diasporic communities such as Armenian-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Asian-Indians, and Latino/a and Chicano/a communities bring to fore the sense of constantly having to negotiate between here and there, past and present, homeland and host land, self and other. The construction of self and identity is not a naturally occurring phenomenon that can be objectively studied but is constituted by historical, political, and social forces. The personal and collective remembering of dislocation, discrimination and hardships has played an important part in constructing and maintaining Diasporas.

28 Indian Diasporic communities are sometimes further classified on the basis of regional affiliations (people from a specific Indian region like Punjab, Gujarat etc.), religion or ethnicity.


30 To be part of a Diaspora, a community needs to connect (in manner of customs, tradition, language, clothing etc.) in some way with the homeland. Also, the context and route of migration, often determine whether one is considered to be part of a diaspora, exile, refugee and so on.
In this postwar era, the ‘Indian Diaspora is more than just people in their designated territories—it is more of a concept and a set of social transformations. Describing the Indian Diaspora, Shukla (2003) states:

In allowing us to consider how migrant peoples negotiate life amid tremendous social, cultural and political change, by building the “imagined communities” of nations, by creating identities, and by expressing themselves as multiply constituted, Diaspora invokes, always with qualification, ways of life—community, culture, and society. As a conceptual space of negotiation, the Indian Diaspora allows us to challenge the dichotomization of the global and local. So while the United States and England may be sites for expressions of locality, they are cross-cut, always, by forces from other worlds, only one of which is an imagining of India.31

The Indian Diaspora, unlike the Jewish or black Diasporas that emerged out of a history of suffering and persecution and subsequent compelled dispersion, was created out of a sentiment of progress and modernity. Shukla (2003) differentiates the concept of Indian Diaspora from the Diasporas that emerged out of forced compulsion on the basis of the following arguments. Firstly, the compulsion in scattering does not hold true in the case of migrants from developing countries such as India and those in Latin America or Africa, since the availability of economic possibilities, and possibilities that would constitute a form of survival, are lacking in such regions.

Secondly, she states that a Diaspora gains meaning from its cultural and historical specificity producing contrasts between Jewish and Indian cases. And thirdly, Shukla (2003) claims that Diaspora should not be seen as a reference to a one nation or reflecting a singular state of being, but rather as a constructing space where many identities are negotiated.

2.3. Historical Narrative of the Indian Diaspora

The history of the Indian Diaspora is more than a series of historical facts or written accounts, but more about an exploration of the Indian subject and the proliferation of his Identity outside India. Paul Veyne in ‘Writing History: Essay on Epistemology’ states that, “History with a capital H...does not exist. There only exist ‘histories of...’”\(^{32}\). According to Veyne, an event implies a context because it has a meaning; it refers back to a plot of which it is one episode or an indefinite number of plots. Hence the stories or narratives, or in Veyne’s terms the “plots”, may go into different directions and bring forth a new dimension to existing “histories”.

In the case of the history of the Indian Diaspora, the “plots” link various events and add to a detailed historical narrative. This narrative, however, may not be the

purest\textsuperscript{33} form of historical fact that one would wish to seek, as such narratives are sometimes lost in the complexities of factual as well as imagined memories. The “plots” about Indianness emanate from a mythical “homeland,”\textsuperscript{34} while others emerge through formations dispersed across state boundaries, and thus the nation is not just limited to a specific location or place. A collection of repercussions and projections in and through a notion of India forms a representational archive that Diasporic subjects draw on in their production of culture, as an alibi for individuals to identify with one another and create communities, a historical Indianness is constantly being adapted and reworked.\textsuperscript{35}

Just as the history of migration is a history of nations, the histories of India that migrants re-imagine are also histories of multiple nations. A central quality of Diasporic Indianness, then is its discursive arrangement in transnational space, ordered not by a line from one point to another, but by a circularity of movement.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} By ‘purest’ I refer to the documented records and data of government agencies. The history of the Indian diaspora consists of the undocumented narratives and stories of immigrants that migrated to various parts of the world and their stories took the shape of folklores and devised the world views of the generations that followed them.

\textsuperscript{34} Mythical Homeland, in this context, implies a place to which emigrated people hold allegiance as a place of their origin. Even though migration might have occurred (in some cases generations prior), the feeling of belonging has not yet been stripped away. The notion of a myth percolates due to invented traditions and rituals which try to impart a sense of national belonging commonly understood as culture or ethnicity. This concept, in essence, is a direct comparable to “imagined communities”, where a group of people populate a space, and attempt to recreate their original homeland.

\textsuperscript{35} Sandhya Shukla, India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 28.
Due to such circular historical paths defining the history of the Indian Diaspora, one needs to consider a specific time frame for constructing a cohesive narrative. Multiple events in the world, such as the abolition of the African slavery, World Wars I and II and the immigration reforms in the industrialized nations, affected the multiple trajectories that the Indian Diaspora took. One way to track the history of the Indian Diaspora would be to look at it from the standpoint of events that took place in the Indian nation that encouraged migration. For the purpose of putting forth the history of Indian Diaspora, I shall follow a chronological path consisting of the significant events that transformed the Indian Identity and its presence around the globe.

2.3.1. The Pre-independence Era (1800-1947)

The most important date that defines Indian nationalism and its subject is the emergence of the Indian Nation in 1947 from its 200 year old British colonial rule. Tracing the history of the emergence of the Indian Diaspora is connected with the history of migration of Indians to various parts of the globe. The movement of Indians around the world began well before colonialism and through colonialism acquired the shape that is familiar to us today.\(^{37}\) Colonialism has been a significant factor in altering

the Indian Identity, and thus the Indian subject. Therefore, its role in the evolution of the Indian Diaspora cannot be ruled out.

Colonialism played an important role in slowly favoring the transition of the Indian community from India to other parts of the world. As proposed by Sandhya Shukla, migration out of India was not a culturally disruptive act, but the movement of people resulted out of years of British colonial rule. Fundamental to any form of colonialism is the movement of people, capital, and governing bodies, and occupying center stage within the British variety is the Indian worker immigrant. Though Colonialism does not define the beginnings of India or of the migration, yet it has played a vital role in the emergence of the nation state of India and its represented history. It determined a sense of connection between India and its peoples; and England and its cultures.

The first wave of migration occurred as a means to fulfill the shortage of workers on the sugarcane plantations and other agricultural activities produced by the abolition of African slavery in 1834. Between 1830 and 1920, a large proportion of Indians living abroad served as indentured labor in Mauritius, Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, Reunion,

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Jamaica, Trinidad, Martinique, British Guiana, Natal, and elsewhere. Apart from working as an underclass of laborers, Indians also found work in the form of sailors or lascars for British ships transporting goods. Some of the Indian women employed as maids and nannies for the British families found their way to England and thus became part of the British cityscape by the late 1800s.

The movement of Indians to North America was also around the 1800s, where newly developing fishing industries and railroads attracted labor. Droughts and famine in the region of Punjab in North western India, also forced many Indians to leave in search of work elsewhere in the world. Many Sikh soldiers who had earlier served the British army began to migrate to North America in search for better work opportunities.

Simultaneous with the onset of Indian immigration to the United States was an engagement with India and things Indian, though not through the formal apparatuses of colonialism, but instead through a kind of cultural exchange. India began to be seen as a spiritual haven. Various scholars have uncovered the intellectual commerce between religious trends in India and elite United States’ philosophical circles, in

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writings by people like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson; theosophical movements’ established doctrinal links between Buddhism and Brahmanism, and the category of “Boston Brahmin” emerged from this socio-cultural formation. The world came to know about the religious and spiritual philosophies from India at the Chicago World’s fair of 1893 when Swami Vivekananda delivered a talk at the World’s Parliament of Religions.

However, apart from events such as these, the major movement of people happened in the farm labor. A small community in the town of Bellingham in Washington State was formed by a group of Indian manual laborers in the early 1900s. Apart from being exploited at the hands of their employers, this community, like many other Asian immigrant working classes, experienced hostile behavior from the native population.

In California, the issue of race and labor had another aspect. Many Indians, mostly Sikhs from Punjab, had migrated to California in order to fill a burgeoning agricultural economy. Fulfilling the same symbolic functions as other Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Filipino workers, Indians too were part of the “Asian problem,” and Punjabi Sikhs, Indian Muslims, and others were all considered to constitute a “Hindu

Invasion.”42 The issue of race continued to lay ambiguous for the Indian immigrant in the United States.

On one hand, they formed part of a local racial world, occupying a third, or perhaps even a fourth, racialized space, after former African slaves, Native Americans, East Asians who had been in the area for longer time and in much greater numbers, and Mexicans. The broader racial categorizations of humanity, as Aryan, Negro, or Oriental, omitted Indians. Within the parameters of reigning scientific languages of race, then, “Indians” as a people comprised a variety of affiliations, among which “Aryan” was perhaps the most ambiguous. Not surprisingly, the brown, non-East Asian, non-Native American, non-African, and purportedly Aryan immigrants posed a conceptual and political problem to racial ideologues in the United States.43

The large amount of ambiguity in the racial distinction of Indians also resulted in ambiguity in the immigration laws. Subsequent amendments of these laws resulted in complete denial of any form of citizenship to the non-whites.

The shift in contemporary history occurred with the two world wars that again indirectly involved the Indian population as soldiers and workers for the British army. The end of the Second World War in 1945 coincided with the emergence of an

42 Cited in “Histories and Nations” in India Abroad by Sandhya Shukla. For further reading, see Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore (New York: Penguin, 1989), 296-297. Takiki discusses a number of articles published in the early 1900s that point at the perceived threat that Indian immigrants posed to the West.

independent state of India in the year 1947. A new India was born and so was the new Indian Identity.

At the same period, the United States inaugurated the “American Century” with the rise of intellectuals and policymakers like Henry Luce and others in the 1940s, who espoused an aggressive nationalism to combat disruptive political trends around the world, including socialism, anti imperialism, and anti colonialism.\textsuperscript{44} The United States’ government, despite granting the right of naturalization to Indian immigrants in 1946, installed a quota of only one hundred immigrants from India per year.

By the time of Indian independence, small populations of Indian migrants remained in the United States, in California and New York especially, but altogether not more than 4000. Many who had in the 1920s and 1930s been deprived of citizenship rights were also subject to the greater implementation of alien land laws; denaturalized and immigrant Indians who owned land in California were thus stripped of an important investment not only in the region itself, but also in a broader vision of life in the United States.\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{45} Sandhya Shukla, India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 46.
2.3.2. 1947: The Birth of a new Nation and new Subjectivity

The Indian Independence in 1947 hugely affected the Diaspora. It tied down the political as well as social consciousness of the Indian subject. National liberation, the liberation of memory of colonial subjugation, antagonism toward the colonizer, and an exploited position with regard to the West, through knowledge of England, all became important elements in a transformed and structuring nationalist narrative that Indians carried with them through the Diaspora.\footnote{Sandhya Shukla, \textit{India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 44.}

The largest number of immigrants in this early period came from Punjab and Gujarat, due to the centrality of these states within the British colonial establishment (and hence the familiarity of Britain as an imagined site) and also the high levels of unemployment in the rural and business sectors of these state economies. In western London, Punjabi, mostly Sikh immigrants gravitated to areas where other family and kin from home had already settled and associations and networks of employment and housing council had developed.\footnote{Ibid, 50.}

With the independence of India in 1947, not only was the Indian subject in flux but so was the world around him.\footnote{Sandhya Shukla (2003) states that “for those abroad, for those who stayed home (India) and for would-be migrants, the construction of the nation state of India established a form of citizenship that would bestow a new form of subjectivity in a world determined by hierarchies of value based on national economic power in a capitalist market, and, by extension, military prowess to maintain those positions.” Thus, according to Shukla (2003), national liberation, the memory of colonial subjugation, antagonism}
was looking towards a big change. The end of the war, as well as the accelerating demise of the British colonialism, had created not only the formal assignation of sections of the globe as “first” and “third” worlds, but a significant shift in the relationships between those places, based on economic, political, and, not least important, cultural hierarchies.49

The Indian immigration history in United States is considered by some scholars (Bhatia 2007; Rangaswamy 2000; Prashad, 2000), to have started with the passing of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.50 However, precluding this, the 1946 Luce-Cellar bill, that permitted naturalization and thus small immigration quotas; facilitated initial immigration of Indian students and professionals. The small number and dispersed settlements of these immigrants did not form a significant Indian community toward the colonizer, and an exploited position with regard to the West, through knowledge of England—deeply influenced the structuring of the nationalist narrative that the Indians carried with themselves to the rest of the world. Also, the partition of the subcontinent into majority Hindu and Muslim states disrupted the solidarity of the Indian immigrant community that had previously unified on the basis of antagonism towards the colonizer. Thus with the emergence of separate states, separate and distinct “histories” of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis also started emerging. Identities in the Diaspora, states Shukla (2003), became more particularized after independence because of the many issues at stake in state, regional, religious, and linguistic conflicts.


50 Bhatia (2007, 14) claims that, “by all accounts the 1965 immigration and Nationality Act fundamentally changed the background of Indians migrating to the United States.” Also, Rangaswamy (2000, 40) claims that within a short period of time, Indian migrants in the United States changed from being “pariahs to elite”. 

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in United States.\textsuperscript{51} This has been enumerated in the following table from the United States census statistics. The table shows the number of people arriving in the United States that claimed India as their originating point. In the entire period between 1946 and 1964, only 6,319 Indians immigrated to the United States.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year} & \textbf{Number of Immigrants} \\
\hline
1947 & 318 \\
1948 & 198 \\
1949 & 177 \\
1950 & 107 \\
1951 & 104 \\
1952 & 130 \\
1953 & 128 \\
1954 & 159 \\
1955 & 187 \\
1956 & 202 \\
1958 & 379 \\
1959 & 302 \\
1960 & 243 \\
1961 & 352 \\
1962 & 476 \\
1963 & 975 \\
1964 & 425 \\
1965 & 549 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Fig. 2.1: US census data showing the arrival of people that claim India as their originating point. (Source: United States Bureau of the Census, \textit{Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970})\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 15.

2.3.3. The Post’65 emergence of the Indian Diaspora in the United States

The dramatic shift in numbers post the introduction of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 opened a new chapter in Indian immigration. The Immigration and Naturalization Service reported that while 582 immigrants had come from India in 1965 and 2,458 in 1966, in each year following, that number increased by thousands and in 1974 reached 12,795.\textsuperscript{54} According to the United States Census Bureau (2000) figures, there were 1.7 million people in the United States that claimed Indian descent. The Indian born population in the region of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania increased an astounding 167 percent to 498,000 from the period of 1990 to 2005.\textsuperscript{55} There are approximately 20 million people in the Indian diaspora alone.\textsuperscript{56} Large Diasporic communities are based in parts of North America, Western Europe, Gulf countries, South East Asian countries; and in parts of the Caribbean and coastal African


nations (Shukla, 2003). For having high education and professional skills, the Indian Diaspora is also bestowed as the “model minority” in United States.\textsuperscript{57}

The thousands of Indians who came to the United States in the decade following 1965—largely concentrated in New York and then other urban centers, highly educated and professionalized, who began upon their arrival to develop what would be strong ethnic and cultural ties to each other and to Indians all over the world—embodied radically different subjectivities from those immigrants of earlier years.\textsuperscript{58} The post 1965 flow of immigrants to United States forms an important link in the history of the evolution of the Indian Diaspora. Due to the change in the immigration laws, many skilled Indians successfully migrated to various parts of the United States, among these were doctors, engineers and students seeking higher education.

\textsuperscript{57} The model minority discourse relies on the idea that through hard work, family values, and educational qualifications, some migrant communities are able to rise above their circumstances. However, the model minority status of the Indian migrant community in the United States does not take into account the fact that the life of a well educated Indian migrant begins at a different starting point than that of other minorities (Hispanic Latinos, other Asian American communities and Black America); thus undue comparison is futile. The successful “acculturation” or “assimilation” of professional Indian immigrants in the US workforce is based on a special provision of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that allows the entry of only a few highly qualified transnational migrants. For further reading, see: Sunil Bhatia, \textit{American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora} (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007).

\textsuperscript{58} Sandhya Shukla, \textit{India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 58.
Anthropologist Maxine Fischer studied the post 1965 Indian immigrant community. Her research published as ‘Indians of New York City’ gives a detailed account of the early beginnings of the Indian ethnic community in New York. In this project, Fischer noted both the heterogeneity of Indians as well as the local efforts to come up with a consolidated Indian Identity—something that brought about a new Indian consciousness and strengthened their ties with the homeland.

The process of translating differences and similarity from back home (India) into lived (and represented) experiences in the United States operated through the multiple vectors of regional and religious affiliation, national Identity, and spatial distribution. Cultural and political associations all over the United States, but certainly concentrated in California and New York, began to form in the 1970s with various constituencies, such as the Sikh Cultural Society, the Indian Association of Long Island, and the Indo American Cultural Association of Westchester. The emergence of the Association of Indians in America (AIA) in 1971 signaled the development of a broader formation through an Indian Identity that serviced some kind of representation within the United States.

By the mid 1970s, Indians had become a significant part of the working middle class of America and in turn brought with them newer cultural heritage in its existing diverse culture. With the presence of large Indian immigrant population, the peripheral areas of New York City such as Queens and Westchester started slowly getting transformed into cultural nodes. Gradually, concentrations of Indian shops and

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services, called by some as “Little Indias,” developed first in Manhattan, in the East 26th-28th Street and Lexington Avenue area.

As time passed and new immigrants arrived, more Indian ethnic commercial districts started to take form. Jackson Heights and Flushing areas of Queens developed subsequently. The credentialed Indians soon moved out of the peripheral areas of New York to suburban communities of New Jersey and Westchester, thus giving rise to cultural and political associations, and further developing concentrated Indian ethnic enclaves.
Chapter 3: Indian subjectivity in *Bend it like Beckham*

The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the ‘middle passage’, or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, 200
In this chapter I explore the Indian subjectivity and the notions attached to being Indian. The story of *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) revolves around the lives of an Indian family living in Hounslow West, Southall, London, a neighborhood predominantly known for its Punjabi Sikh population. Directed by Gurinder Chadha, the film deals with multicultural and multiracial subjects, trudging between characters that are struggling to create a distinct identity for themselves that appeases their Eastern world traditions while living in a Western society. The emphasis throughout the film is on being a model Indian person. In this chapter, I endeavor to understand what it means to be *Indian* in a Diasporic context.

During the course of the film, there is a strong emphasis on feminist issues and queer sentiments. Comparisons can also be made between the modern form of Diaspora represented by the younger generation and that occupied by the older generation. In the final scene of the film, Jessminder ‘Jess’ Bhamra (Parminder Nagra), the main protagonist, is about to take the penalty kick that can take her team to victory; when she suddenly visualizes her family members as part of the opposing team. This is the chance for her to rise above her fears and break the wall of obsolete thinking and everything else that is holding her back.
Figure 3-1

Jess sees her family in her dream, defending the goal post as she plays soccer.

Using humor and comical references, Chadha presents the complexities of living in a multicultural environment. The negotiation of identities and creation of space to support specific cultural, ethnic and religious needs are the common denominators that produce a distinct immigrant lifestyle. In this particular case, the lives of a Sikh family in an ethnic Indian neighborhood—Southall in West London are highlighted.

Another issue that is highlighted in the film is the role of women in preserving and sustaining the myth of Indian culture. The film uses gender and queer issues to bring forth the sentiments of the Punjabi community. The multiple identities and gender roles taken up by the characters, in a way, support the stereotypes but also question the obvious. The character of Jess symbolizes the struggles and tribulations of
the Diaspora that has to switch between different roles, and alter itself with changing
times. Jess’s association with soccer is looked down upon by her family. Soccer, a sport
that is supposed to be masculine in nature does not complement the ‘Indian woman’
image that Jess’s parents want her to adopt.

3.1. The Film Narrative: Bend it Like Beckham

Taking soccer as the backdrop of the film, Chadha looks at the life of Jessmendir
‘Jess’ Kaur Bhamra (Parminder Nagra), a young British girl with a Punjabi heritage,
whose passion for the sport and the romantic involvement with her white Irish coach,
makes her constantly negotiate between her Punjabi and British identity. Her father,
Manmohan Singh Bhamra (Anupam Kher) is a stereotypical Punjabi immigrant who
works at the Heathrow International Airport. The proximity to the Heathrow
International Airport allows the people of Hounslow West to take up security,
administrative and desk staff jobs at the airport. The mother, Sukhwinder Bhamra
(Shaheen Khan) is a home maker and is shown to be very traditional and conservative
in her approach. Her character, another stereotype of a traditional Punjabi woman
living in London, is always seen in traditional Punjabi clothing of salwaar kameez with a
dupatta (scarf like garment). Jess’s older sister, Pinky Bhamra (Archie Panjabi) also
works at the Heathrow International Airport. The four members of this Punjabi
immigrant family represent the different identity structures that can be found in a Diasporic landscape. Soccer being viewed as a masculine sport is not encouraged for Jess, who according to her father, must start behaving like a 'proper Indian woman'.

Jess’s interest in soccer gets her to become the first Indian girl to play for a local soccer club, and eventually for Santa Clara, an American University, that sponsors her education. Coming from a traditional Sikh family, Jess is expected to follow the religious and cultural customs that her family believes in. The hidden cultural reservations and complexities that go with being a migrant get highlighted in this process. Over the course of the film, it is revealed that on having faced racial prejudices in Kenya, the Bhamra family had chosen to migrate to United Kingdom, eventually settling in Hounslow, Southall area of London. These experiences heavily altered the thinking of the family elders resulting in a divide where anybody who is not an Indian, appears threatening and is therefore unwelcome. On the other hand, the children who consider themselves to be British are left to juggle between their Punjabi Indian identity and the British identity in order to avoid conflicts.

Chadha also questions the heteronormative structure associated with being an Indian. The parents have been shown to have no nationalistic connection with India but are adhering to obsolete and pastiche culture borrowed from the time they first migrated to the west.
3.2. History of the Bhamra family substantiated by immigrant history of Southall

Migrants from India began to arrive in Southall in around 1957 and the dominant community was Punjabi Sikhs from Hoshiarpur and Jullundhar district of India. Southall, which was predominantly a sleepy industrial district, began employing these migrants and thus began the cycle of migration of more immigrants from Punjab. A wide range of Southall area factories that produced plastic, foodstuffs, and textiles began to hire only Asians for particular tasks, and specifically for low-wage, unskilled jobs.61

Although the transformation of the neighborhood from being a purely English industrial town to an Indian immigrant hub was gradual, there was a huge resentment in the native English residents. An account of a longtime resident of Southall—R.J Meads, described by Sandhya Shukla (2003), presents the indignation faced by the Indian immigrants.

Meads wrote: “The whole of Southall has become badly run down. Our new citizens seem to love bright colours which shows when they decorate their house—some

very good, but not all—and add to this, the rubbish left on the front gardens has a very bad effect on our terrace type streets.”

As the social and political climate in the 1960s and 1970s changed, so did the shape of the Indian population in Southall. Many African nations that had recently liberated themselves from the clutches of colonialism began to exclude the Indian population that was present in these countries. Indians, as a result of British colonial policies had been taken to parts of East Africa to build railroads and many such migrants continued staying back after colonial rule ended. The Indians in Kenya and Uganda were amongst the ones that were most affected in the liberation movements that aspired for all African Black States. In 1967, a number of Kenyan Indians left to come to London and some of them eventually settled in Southall.

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62 The whole account can be found in Meads RJ, 93, 275 n. 19, 277 n. 42. Also quoted in Sandhya Shukla (2003). The new immigrants, whose number increased in manifolds from their first appearance in the 1950s, began to assert their own identity onto this industrial borough. The British authorities began to worry about the number of Southall schools that were flooded by immigrant children and thus began the process of assimilation and integration. What followed were methods of integrating the immigrant population into the native English culture; the school curriculum was altered to include material on immigrant culture—methods to turn the pupils into “British” (residentially) if not English (ethnically). Also, this was an attempt to balance the ratio of native and immigrant children; thus forcing many immigrant children from Ealing (the borough where Southall is situated) to take admission in schools in other districts. This policy was an attempt to prevent the possibility of majority Indian Southall schools and consequently the consolidation of certain areas as “Indian areas” (Shukla, 2003).
3.3. Indian subjectivity and Nationalism in the Diasporic discourse

The ways in which the Indian migrants see themselves is interconnected with the issues of race, ethnicity, social inequality and their immigration history. The “lived experiences” of the Indian migrants influence the way they perceive themselves and the Indian way of life. This Indian way of life, dictates to a great extent how the Indian immigrant attempts to present himself and sustains his environment by looking up to various mediums to establish a sense of belonging and connectivity to the homeland. These mediums, usually, are part of the popular culture and often work to bridge the gap between homeland and host land.

While documenting the “lived experiences” of the Indian Diaspora in the United States, Sunil Bhatia, author of ‘The American Karma’, attributes the difficulty in defining the concept of Indianness, Indian homeland or Indian culture, to the heterogeneous and diverse cultural map of the Indian Diaspora.

The term Indianness, though is taken as a means to establish and justify the culture and way of life of the Indian Diaspora, remains an ambiguous term. As can be seen from the ethnographic studies conducted by Bhatia (2007) on the Indian community of Connecticut, it is shown how the term Indian culture is differently perceived and justified by many Indian migrants.
Taking an example from the documented and published interviews of some of the people from the Indian community, it can be seen that Indianness is often understood either as traditional, cultural and religious values or in some cases, seen relatively better than American way of life.63 The participants in the study conducted by Bhatia belonged to the upper middleclass professionals who had migrated to the United States post 1965. They could not single out a specific point that defined Indianness, this could be attributed to the shear vastness and complexity of India and how culture and values of different regions cannot be homogenized into a singular national Identity. However, the study showed that the participants agreed upon certain common denominators that defined Indianness. Among these were—family’s sense of togetherness, hard work, self sacrificing mentality, and reverence for parents, religious practices, and ancient cultural heritage.

At an individual level, Indianness according to these participants was in certain personality traits and cultural customs such as eating, and marriage rituals, sexual taboos, celebration of gods and goddesses, and religious festivals.

The concept of Indianness according to some participants acquires its meaning against the backdrop of both India and America. Some of the statements given by the participants placed Indians to be more religious minded as well as family oriented.

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compared to Americans. Also, some suggested that America lacks the nurturing environment as found in India, and that all relationships are based on give and take.\textsuperscript{64}

From such kind of responses, one can determine how the Indian migrant chooses to undermine the qualities and sense of belongingness offered by the host country (in this case United States) and tries to place his homeland at a higher pedestal. Such kind of comparisons and assumptions often lead to the formation of a false, and to some extent, imagined picture of the homeland. The homeland appears superior and in many ways more accommodating than the host country. The sense of nostalgia and longing towards homeland seem to erupt from such kind of assumptions.

Such sentiments are also echoed in the Diasporic films based on the lives of the Indian immigrant. Being Indian is often considered synonymous with being highly traditional and following a set of customs that are considered to be a way of cultivating moral culture.

Postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (2001) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) argue that the nineteenth-century Indian nationalism was not a rejection of the West, but rather a way to produce an Indian modernity by using selective understandings of European modernity, while at the same time maintaining a certain

\textsuperscript{64}Please refer to Page 81 in \textit{American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora} for actual interviews conducted by Sunil Bhatia.
cultural and spiritual distinction. Hence, the domestic, home, spiritual and Indian were gendered feminine, and the material public and Western as masculine (Partha Chatterjee, 1993). Modern was thus derived to be a masculine trait associated with Westernization. On the contrary, cultural difference was produced through projecting tradition as the feminine domain of native and spiritual.

Chatterjee (1993), claims that this anticolonial nationalism differentiated itself from its Western counterparts through the reassigning of roles in the public and private spheres. In the name of motherhood, family and purity (marked as tradition), sexuality was also driven by anticolonial nationalism. Women’s interest was collapsed with the interest of the heteronormative family and the home. Desai (2004) adds to this claim and posits that women have somatically represented the nation itself and have been figured as mother of it. As a result, in the beginning of the century, the middle class family emerged as an institution that produced national culture through representations of women’s bodies.

Within the colonial and national context, national independence marked bourgeois women as home, nation and spirituality. Furthermore, in (neo) colonial discourses, the burden of sexual and gender oppressions is laid at the feet of patriarchal and feudal “traditions” (of religion, marriage, and heterosexuality) located within the “Indian” family. Since then, the

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deterritorialized nations of the Diasporic communities have similarly gendered and configured cultural nationalism.\textsuperscript{66}

Therefore, women embody the cultural and national pride in Diasporic communities despite being removed from the actual site of nation state. In \textit{Bend it like Beckham}, the women are expected to follow the traditions and customs of the homeland despite living in London. Jess’s interest to play soccer professionally is therefore viewed as something that comes in the way of necessary labor required to run a household; and to lead a domestic way of life.

\textbf{3.4. Nation and Diaspora gendered and racialized: Being a Sikh woman}

Additional complexity in \textit{Bend It like Beckham} comes from multiple themes that the film touches. Jess, is not just dealing with being an Indian woman in Britian, but is also shown trying to fit the mold of a Sikh Indian woman, which, in the film, is expected to marry a man who is also of Sikh origin (like her mother, father, relatives and friends in England). This becomes apparent at Pinky’s wedding, in the way that the guest that are present gossip about Jess’s future, her soccer and the kind of man she should marry.

In addition, when Jess is on the soccer field, her female friends that go to watch her are not really interested in seeing her play soccer. She is merely a pretext for them to see the boys who are playing with her. The three girls seated in a bench, are almost dressed alike in pink blouses, typical of how little girls are dressed. They gossip about the boys on the field, that, to Jess are just her soccer teammates. In this scenario, Jess is shown struggling between her interest in playing soccer, and acting more like young women her own age, that are shown to have more of an interest in chasing boys than playing sports like soccer.

As the film unfolds, the viewer is transported to Southall where the Indian community is visibly portrayed. The street scene in this area is full of color and the predominant people one sees on the street seem to be of Indian origin. While Jess goes from one street corner to another with her sister, they run into shoppers viewing sarees on hangers, gowns and women’s clothing made from beautiful and delicate laces, etc. Even in that setting, Jess is presented as the outcast because she wears an athlete’s jersey that is devoid of any colors. Besides being uninterested, the friends she encounters with her sister while walking on the street in Southall are cast in female roles that she is shown removed from.

As Pinky’s wedding scene unfolds, the father, Manmohan Singh Bhamra, who is an employee at Heathrow Airport, can be seen as a stereotypical representation of an
Indian man; dressed in his uniform, he still wears his turban and keeps his beard, part of a distinguishing characteristic among men of Sikh origin. Even when they are in India, the Sikh insist on being culturally distinct from the rest of the Indians by the manner they dress, and the turban and the beards are a must for them to keep regardless of the social responsibility they may hold. The individual immediately assumes a dual cultural identity by that mode of dressing and by profession; this dual identity is personified in Manmohan Singh Bhamra’s character; and its portrayal in the film.

The film begins in a setting one would normally not associate with India—Soccer, with David Beckham as the star who hands over the mantle to Jess as his future successor. The commentators invite Jess’s mother to comment on her daughter’s successes in the field, but a crisis begins to surface as the mother confronts the commentators that they are misleading her daughter. The mother further comments that Jess should not be out on the field exposing her legs to the whole world, but should rather be at home helping with her sister’s upcoming wedding preparations. Much is suddenly brought to view on that little scene: gender, space of women, and a culture clash between what the mother supposedly believes should be the role of women in society, and what her daughter actually wants to do professionally.
Additionally, the men who brought the mother into the studio are shown to be totally oblivious of the apparent gender divisions that the mother believes in. One can, in a way, suggest that the film is beginning with some sort of cultural bias or stereotype of the Indian mother, but perhaps, that is precisely Chadha’s goal. The commentators that are shown to have absolutely no gender bias or reservations are perhaps an extension of the imagination of Jess, for later in the film, at numerous instances, the issue of discrimination against women players in the field of sports in England is revealed.

The scene closes with Jess’s mother scolding Jess about her soccer and asking her to help with her sister—Pinky’s wedding preparations. With this comes the revelation that the soccer match where Jess is playing alongside David Beckham is actually just a dream; however the mother’s cynicism about soccer, her criticism about Jess’s involvement with the sport, and their cultural disagreement about the role of women, easily slip into her dream as well. This shows how Jess’s mind is unconsciously controlled by the way her family sees the world. Their experiences, their cultural and religious beliefs and their fear of the unknown also influence Jess’s view of the world.

The dominance of men in the field of sports, especially soccer is highlighted through various situations created by the filmmaker. Jess, being a young girl from a traditional Punjabi-Indian family has to face many obstacles in order to work towards
her dream of playing soccer professionally. Her dream, though restricted by her family’s worldview is shown to be very naïve and innocent, for she just wants to play soccer and not be called back home to help with the house chores.

On the other hand, her fellow teammate Juliette ‘Jules’ Paxton (Keira Knightly) who is a white British girl faces little criticism for her interest in sports. Unlike Jess, Jules’s father—Alan Paxton (Frank Harper) is a big supporter of the game and encourages her in every way despite continued resistance from the mother—Paula Paxton (Juliet Stevenson). Paula is concerned about her daughter’s lack of interest in boys and anything feminine, and tries often futile ways of convincing Jules to act more like a girl. She even retorts, “No boy’s gonna want to go out with a girl who has bigger muscles than him. Honey, all I am sayin’ is there is a reason why Sporty Spice is the only one of them without a fella.” This remark clearly suggests the way some women perceive other women in sports. Being athletic is often considered to be defying the traditional gender roles assigned to a woman. By crossing the boundary of traditional gender roles, women are subjected to criticism, and a fear of being ostracized by society.

In Jess’s family, the issue of being a girl coupled with being a non-white adds to the fears of her family. Being immigrants from Kenya, Jess’s parents have faced racial discrimination in England; hence they’ve chosen to create a wall around their lifestyle.

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67 Sporty Spice is the screen name for Melanie Jayne Chisholm from the English pop music band—Spice Girls, whose screen image involved a wardrobe involving athletic outfits and dance moves—something considered to being masculine.
preferences and choices—where all people of Indian origin are inside this boundary but other people are unwelcome and considered outsiders. Any attempt to cross this boundary and do as the ‘goras’ do is considered to threaten the traditional and cultural values imbibed by parents in their children. Jess, by playing with boys, wearing shorts, and also playing for the local city soccer team has threatened this divide; and her parents feel that if she is not stopped, she might bring dishonor to the family.

Jess’s family members, who have a traditional and conservative mindset and harbor a fear of being ostracized by the Indian community, do not support Jess’s moving away from the traditional role of a caregiver and a home-maker. Also, Jess’s own friends, who are mainly English boys of Indian origin, ridicule her for being interested in sports and are shown always make fun of her. One of the boys pokes fun at her and says, “Who does she think she is? Beckham or what?” and the other boy make a sexual reference and asks her, “Can you chest it like him? You know give it some bounce?” Jess ignores their remarks and continues her game. The discrimination is also highlighted when Jules complains of inadequate opportunities in the field of soccer for women to play professionally in England. For Jules, soccer has been predominantly understood as a male bastion and women are yet to be considered serious contenders for such a sport, leave aside taking it as a career option for young

68 Gora literally meaning ‘fair complexion’ in Urdu language, is a derogatory term used for the whites by the South Asian community.
“ladies”. This issue which Jess also had to confront is shown to be universal in the movie, and not something that is specific to Jess being of Punjabi-Indian origin.

The psyche of Jess is revealed at the beginning of the film. Firstly, her passion for soccer as a sport and her adulation for the soccer star David Beckham are revealed by the presence of his posters in her room, contrary to the posters hanging in Pinky’s room. Pinky’s room has posters of Bollywood actors whereas Jess’s room is filled with Beckham’s pictures. Also, Jess’s subdued feelings are revealed when she confides her tribulations and miseries to Beckham’s poster like a little girl confiding in her best friend. Jess knows that nobody in her family will be able to understand and appreciate her talent and sooner or later she will have to give up on her dream; for playing soccer is more like a dream and in real life girls are supposed to cook dinners and take up a respectable job, in other words—things that her family considers to be respectable.

While talking with David Beckham’s poster Jess says, “I nearly scored from 25 yards today; bent it and everything. I could’ve carried on playing all night. It’s not fair that the boys never have to come back home and help. I wonder if I had an arranged marriage, would I get someone who would let me play soccer as much as I wanted.” This dialogue says a lot about the turmoil in Jess’s mind. For her, being a successful grown up woman is dependent on being able to find a suitable life partner. The term, ‘Suitable’, equates to a Punjabi Sikh man from a reputed family chosen by the parents.
The whole concept of Arranged Marriage[^69] is highlighted throughout the film, its popularity amongst the Indian Diaspora and the pursuit of negotiating an Indian Identity based on obsolete traditions. Similarly, based on Jules’s mother’s world’s view, soccer is a reserve for men, and according to her, the only things that should interest young women should be going on dates, finding a suitable boy, and getting married at some point in the future.

Jules’s mother suggests “no man is going to date a girl who has more muscles than breasts”. This is in line with her earlier attempts to buy brassieres that are inflated in the store for Jules who flatly refused to wear them. In this sense, regardless of being a Sikh Indian woman, Jess faces the same social discriminations as her English counterpart, Jules. Thus, gender and place in the society always seem to go hand in hand and women seem to suffer both sides of discrimination. It is ironic that Jules’s father seems to accept that his daughter loves soccer more than chasing boys, but the mother did not seem to accept that. Here, the soccer scene where Jess’s mother catches

[^69]: Arranged Marriage is a concept in which the parents or the senior family members choose a bride or a groom for their children. The matrimony is often based on the criteria of religion, caste, family background, family income and the family connections of the siblings of the bride/groom. The groom’s family is often considered to have the greater power and say in the whole matrimonial alliance. Also, traditionally the bride’s family gives gifts for the bride and her new life on the day of the wedding. However, with the corruption of this ritual, the gifts have taken the form of dowry which is essentially a combination of gifts given to the groom’s family in the form of clothes, household furniture, and sometimes cash. Arranged Marriage is still popular in the Indian communities living outside India as highlighted by *Bend it Like Beckham*, but its popularity is losing ground in the metropolitan and urban areas of India. Though the term—Arranged Marriage and Love Marriage are still common in India, the former invites a sense of puzzlement and is often seen as a way of oppression of women by some westerners (also, highlighted in *Bend it Like Beckham*).
her playing with her male friends, and one of them carrying her on his shoulder, became a point of crisis. The mother brought her before the father to complain about Jess, whom she calls a spoiled girl, who would bring shame to the family and who should much rather learn how to cook Punjabi food, and be what the father describes a “proper woman.”

In this sense, although both Jess and Jules face gender discrimination, it appears Jess’s family takes it one step further because they perceive that their daughter’s actions might bring shame to the whole family, and that no “mother-in-law” would want a daughter-in-law who runs around “half-naked” with boys. Here, it is not only the company that is being prescribed, but also the distinct dressing code that a woman must observe.

3.5. Insideness and Outsideness: Home Away from Home in form of ‘Little Indias’

People are their place and a place is its people.70 The experiential understanding of the concept of space and Place was proposed by Edward Relph (1976). Relph suggests why places are such an important element of human experience. He proposed the concept of Insideness, the notion that more a space emanated a sense of

belongingness, more the environment turned into a Place. Relph describes the essence of place in dialectical terms of Insideness and Outsideness. Although, the core issue dealt by Relph was to explore and unravel the experiential aspect of Space, his study also highlighted how the human interaction with a space facilitates the identity of the Place as well as its inhabitants. He claims that the essence of a place lays not so much in the physical and geographical attributes of a place than it does in the experience of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

Relph suggests that the Identity of places cannot be understood in terms of patterns of physical and observable features, nor as a product of attitudes but as a combination of all. He proposes that the Identity of a place comprises of three interrelated components, namely—physical features or appearances, observable activities and functions, and meanings or symbols. Hence, with continuous exchange of experiences and characteristics, each place develops a unique set of Identity constructs that responds to the spirit of the place. He further states,

Identity is neither an easily reducible nor a separable quality of places—it is neither constant nor absolute, nor is it constantly changing and variable. The Identity of place takes several forms, but it is the very basis of our experience of this place as compared to any other.71

Norberg-Schulz states that to be inside is the primary intention behind the place concept; that is to be somewhere, away from what is outside.72 From outside, one looks

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at a place in the same way as a visitor might look at it from a distance but from inside one experiences a place or belongs to it.

The inside-outside division, as Relph notes, presents itself as a simple but basic dualism that is fundamental in our experiences of lived-space and one that provides the essence of place. The inside–outside gets manifested in many forms such as geographical boundaries—one is in a country or outside it; city limit—you are either within a city or beyond it; the boundary wall of a gated community—non-residents require a permit to enter ‘inside’. Hence the walls, gateways and thresholds act as the mediums of transition from one mode to another. Taking the concept of the sacred and the profane, Eliade states that the threshold constitutes not only the boundary between the inside and outside but also the passage from one to the other.⁷³

Relph states that the reversal of Insideness and Outsideness occurs because we become the center of a mental space, that is, the level of belonging decreases with decreasing adherence to a place. These (concentric) zones are defined by our intentions; if our interest is focused on our home then everything beyond home is outside, if our concern is with our local district then everything beyond that district is outside, and so on.⁷⁴

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I have borrowed this phenomenological study exploring the boundary of man environment system, in order to give an overall view on how immigrant spaces tend to emulate the environment of the home country. The concept of Insideness and Outsideness as elucidated by Relph can be seen in the scene where a ritual prior to Pinky’s wedding is taking place. The Bhamra residence is filled with friends and relatives who are shown to be Indians; not a single non-Indian is part of this celebration.
Also, the next door neighbor seems to be oblivious of this huge celebration. The neighbor, who for a brief moment is captured by the camera, is a white woman who chooses to dry her laundry while her Indian neighbors are having a wedding ritual.

The contrast in the two spaces is highlighted by the hedge that separates the two households, also, this hedge symbolizing the spatial as well as cultural divide brings to notice the way an Indian immigrant family chooses to conduct itself in this environment. It’s a whole different world that has been borrowed from India and replanted in a small borough of London. The rituals, language, food, dance, music; all signify the Culture and Ethnicity that the migrants have tried to preserve; for these things define who they are. These linkages to their motherland define their Identity.

The safe haven created by the Bhamra family lies inside their boundary of Insideness. Their home, and its peripheral space, has been molded in order to suit their needs and functions. On an experiential level, their interaction with this piece of land has resulted in a place where existential Insideness (as proposed by Relph) has transcended. Existential Insideness is a strong sense of oneness that people feel from places that provide them with a sense of security—places like their homes or familiar regions. Anything outside this boundary gets constituted as Outsideness, another term coined by Relph. Outsideness translates in form of alienation and strangeness that an individual would experience in unknown, unfamiliar or hostile environments.
Outsidness, thus, takes the form of alienation arising out of displacement and rupture that are key elements that mold a migrant identity.

It is interesting to note that the concept of ‘Other’, that has been central in the discussions of Bhabha, Shukla, Spivak and many noted post colonial scholars, finds its way to the essence of Places. This is notably because Relph’s thesis of existential Insideness and Outsideness is based on the whole idea of human interaction and how one communicates with his surroundings. If the sense of otherness is being experienced by an individual, then this sense of difference will surely reflect onto the physical spaces the individual inhabits. For everything that works diametrically at opposite ends, the end carries with it the assumption of the other.

The environment is closely linked to the culture and a number of aspects of man-environment interaction and design. This can be seen in terms of congruence whereby people try to match their characteristics, values, expectations and norms, and behavior and so on to the physical environment through design or migration.\(^75\) It might be argued that the environment of the ethnic spaces gets produced as an antidote to the bigger Environment that has been largely unresponsive to the needs of the ethnic immigrant community.

\(^75\) The creation of “Little Indias” can also be attributed to this.
This can be held as a factor that helps in facilitating the way immigrant spaces get formulated over a period of time. The architectural schema of many buildings in Indian Ethnic enclaves doesn’t necessarily follow the style of the host country but in a way attempts to emulate the style of the home country.\footnote{The style may not necessarily translate in symbolic architectural motifs, but they are incorporated in the way interiors are designed. A reason behind this could be the fact that the fluid nature of interior setting of a space is easier to mold according to the choice of the user rather than the exteriors. As seen in many restaurants serving the Indian cuisine, an attempt is made to “Indianise” the interiors by using motifs, patterns, finishes and colors that symbolize India and Indianness.}

The domestic spaces such as residences depict the lifestyle and choices of the people inhabiting them. In \textit{Bend it Like Beckham}, the life of an immigrant Punjabi family living in United Kingdom has been shown. The interior of the residence has been inspired by the house of Chadha’s parents in London.\footnote{Affirmed by Director’s Cut on the film.} The Victorian house situated in Hounslow, London is one of the many houses that are part of a West London neighborhood. The interior space is filled with trinkets and souvenirs from India. The artwork includes a picture of Guru Nanak Dev (the founder of Sikhism), a small marble replica of the Taj Mahal, an old globe, and traditional Indian handicrafts and textiles.
Diasporic filmmakers tend to portray spaces that are familiar and comforting. Often times, belonging to first, sometimes second-generation immigrant families, they attempt to portray the kind of complex cultural lifestyle they saw and experienced in their childhood. This experience thus brings more authenticity to the characters and narratives in their films. In *Bend it like Beckham*, Chadha too attempts to provide an insider’s view of the narrative; providing a glimpse of an authentic Diasporic way of life to the viewers.

A common thread that binds our experience in a public communal space and a private place is the sense of familiarity that gets developed over a period of time. This sense of care and concern for is often part of being *known here*, in a particular place. Hence this attachment to a place is termed as being ‘rooted’ to a place. Relph (1976) suggests that to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out to
the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant
spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular.

The places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care, settings in
which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex
of affections and responses. But to care for a place involves more than having a concern
for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations—there is also a
real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to you (self)
and to others.78

Getting back to the concept of Places, it can be posited that the thriving ethnic
neighborhoods around the globe, especially the commercial districts that bring revenue
to the ethnic community, feeds on this concept of familiarity and Insideness. The ethnic
community, in this context the Indian community of London, chooses to live and work
around Southall, which was the foremost area that developed with the onset of
immigrants in the early 20th century. Although sometimes dispersely placed,
Diasporas converge at a single location that seems to bind them beyond the geopolitical
boundaries. The meanings for culture, community, nation, and space, and the

relationship therein, continue to emanate outside the geographical coordinates of several block radius of that which has come to be associated with the "Little Indias".\textsuperscript{79}

The so called "Little Indias" of New York and London, and the subsequent newer agglomerations in New Jersey, California, Chicago, to name a few; continue to host the cultural and national links of the Indian immigrants with their homeland. Often referred as an urban locality with translocal significations, "Little Indias" play a vital role in sustaining the Indian identity as well as help the émigré to maintain strong ties with homeland.

Sandhya Shukla (2003) states that this stage of building defined communities, across time and space, accommodates specific business and residential concentrations of Indian immigrants in the United States. This establishes geography as a primary referent for "community", as well as the more generalized constellation of "Indianness", both imaginative and institutionalized.

Certain common experiences such as narratives from the past, of colonialism, independence, transition to a new country and struggles to obtain economic

\textsuperscript{79} Sandhya Shukla, “Geographies of Indianness” in\textit{ India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England}\ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78. In the 1960s and 1970s, most of the South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) who migrated to England lived in cities of Bradford, Manchester, and Southall. The conglomeration of such a large number of south Asians in one part of the town resulted in identifying such ethnic enclaves as "ghettos" for brown people. They were subsequently known as "Little Indias" or "Little Pakistan" for the kind of racial, cultural and ethnic overtones such spaces had. "Little Indias" are thus an extension of a racial and nationalistic 'branding' that ethnic Indian enclaves all around the world are given by the broader society of the host country.
opportunities help in nurturing relationships between people coming from different backgrounds but identifying to a common ethnic identity of being “Indian”.

The character of the Indian business district located in west London is well captured in Bend it Like Beckham. A few stills from the busy street of Southall, known for its Punjabi Indian population, gives a glimpse of the cultural lifestyle of the Indian migrant. The scene opens up in a busy street of Southall with people of Indian origin, and more prominently the Punjabi Diaspora, are seen buying and selling goods. Jess and Pinky seem like an easy fit in this scenario, they know the shops that they want to go to and the kind of clothing and jewelry they wish to buy. Punjabi women in ethnic clothing of Salwaar kameez are seen everywhere; also the men are shown wearing their traditional turbans. The shot also captures the nuances that an ethnic Indian business district extrudes.

“Jalebi Junction”, a very popular Indian sweet shop, is also emphasized by the filmmaker in this scene. The presence of fresh Jalebis (fried and sweet dough strings) in a busy commercial London Street show the comfortable niche formed by Indian culture in this western city. Even though the camera frames only show bits of the shopping scene in Southall, the viewer is brought from a cozy middle class Indian home in west London to the hustle bustle of commercial activity. The boundaries of inside and outside are evident in this scenario, as not a single white English person can be seen on
these streets; even though Southall is very much a part of London as is any other commercial street like the Piccadily Circus or Oxford Street.

Figure 3-4

“Jalebi Junction” and the commercial street of Southall, London. Source: Still from Bend it like Beckham.
Chapter 4: Mixed *Masala*—Hybridity experienced in *Mississippi Masala*

In some ways it is the historical certainty and settled nature of that term (nationalism) against which I am attempting to write of the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture. This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more connotative than ‘country’; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than ‘the subject’; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, 200

Anxiety links us to the memory of the past while we struggle to choose a path through the ambiguous history of the present.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, xix
In this chapter I deconstruct the connection of Diaspora with the original homeland. I examine how these original homelands are constructed and imagined through political exile. Focusing on Mira Nair’s *Mississippi Masala* (1994), I explore the subject of longing for an adopted homeland coupled with an interracial heterosexual romance. Supporting the most commonly assumed paradigm that Diasporas and Diasporic cultures duplicate the original homelands and their authentic cultures, Nair differentiates her narrative by choosing Uganda, in place of India, as the imagined ‘homeland’ for the Indian origin family that is facing a political exile. The notions of nostalgia and homesickness that are often associated with an émigré and the stipulated homeland show up with new identifications here. The colonial history of India, spices up the lives and identity of the people that willingly, and sometimes forcibly, migrate from their homeland.

*Masala*, a term used for mixture of spices used in South Asian cooking, is a metaphor for the lives of people who have been displaced and affected by political and nationalistic agendas. Apart from taking up different identities and roles, these groups of people try to maintain ties with the original homeland despite no political connections with it.

Critiquing Nair’s feature productions, Desai (2004) states that Nair’s contribution to the formation and emergence of South Asian Diasporic cinema cannot be overstated.
Many of Nair’s features portray the failure of the postcolonial nation-state, and among these, many focus on the exilic or Diasporic displacement, national (dis)identification, interethnic racism and fragmentation of the nuclear family. The films usually begin with the failure of the postcolonial nation-state into a successful pluralistic society. Unlike many South Asian Diasporic films that solely focus on yearnings for the homeland amongst middle aged first generation immigrants, Nair’s films critique the notion of original homeland and the creation of alternative families. Except her first feature length film Salaam Bombay!, Nair’s productions have all been made in the mode of Hollywood cinematic productions. Nair reports that it was a struggle to be able to portray the themes of *Mississippi Masala*; Diasporic displacement, national identification, interethnic racism, and interracial desire; on Hollywood celluloid and without white leads.\(^{80}\) The film however grossed a modest $7.3 million with stars like Denzel Washington and newcomer Sarita Choudhury as the lead protagonists.

### 4.1. Film Narrative: *Mississippi Masala*

The story of *Mississippi Masala* (1994) revolves around the lives of Jai Loha (Roshan Seth), his wife Kinu (Sharmila Tagore) and their daughter Mina (Sarita

Situated in Greenwood, Mississippi, the film follows the expulsion of Jai and his family from Uganda and their subsequent lives in the American South. Mina’s heterosexual interracial romance is the story in the foreground that is interjected by flashbacks and nostalgic imaginings of home by Jai.

The film begins on November 7th, 1972, in Kampala, which is the capital city of the African Nation Uganda. The Ugandan militia soldiers stop a car and scrutinize its passengers amongst which one is of Indian origin and the other an African man. The expression on the face of the passengers displays the scenario that has been gripped by fear and uncertainty. This is the result of a military coup that has brought General Idi Amin into power and now the General wants to make massive changes to the way the Ugandan economy and its people function. General Amin, in 1972, decreed a call for an all-African nation—a Black African nation. This drastic move resulted in the exile of hundreds of people of Indian origin that had settled in Uganda from colonial times and made Uganda their home.

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81 According to Cohen (1997), Desai (2004), approximately 50,000 Asians from Uganda were expelled in the matter of three months in 1972. The British colonial system relegated Africans to the bottom of the socioeconomic and cultural hierarchy, creating an upper class that associated itself with the British and was encouraged to keep a distance with the indigenous population, resulting in a racial and cultural divide. Though less than two percent of the Ugandan population, Asians were not a homogenous group and were subdivided by factors such as regional and linguistic identities (Gujarati and Punjabi), caste differences, and religious identities (Hindu and Muslim). These differences were significant as some of the working poor Asians socialized, lived, and intermarried with black Africans and thus were isolated from their upper middle class Asian counterparts.
Jai is one of the many Indian origin Ugandan nationals who are forced to leave their home in Kampala. While confiding in his childhood friend Okelo (Konga Mbandu), Jai is unable to come to terms with this sudden change in circumstances that is displacing him from his home. He tries to explain his dilemma and frustration to his friend by saying, “Why should I go? Okelo ...this is my home.” But Okelo, who seems to be concerned for the well being of Jai and his family replies, “Not anymore Jai. Africa is for Africans, Black Africans.”

‘Africa is for Africans, Black Africans’ is a very potent expression that sums up the desperate situation created on the basis of political agenda and racial unrest that is forcing Jai and his family to flee their home. On the other hand, it also exposes the beginning of a strained relationship between the two friends. No matter how much sense of belongingness Kampala brought to Jai’s heart, it was in the end, a foreign piece of land and its indigenous people could oust him at any point. Jai, who is unable to accept himself as an outsider continues to live in a sense of denial through the rest of his life in order to retrieve his home and what he considers to be rightfully his.

The film captures the beautiful natural landscape of Uganda with the green foliage and colorful flora seen through the painful heart of Jai. This panoramic view of Uganda, seen as Home by Jai, is often repeated throughout the entire length of the film. For Jai, Uganda is a prosperous home that sustained and nourished him his entire life.
The pain of leaving his home has transpired into homesickness and torments Jai’s heart for rest of the time.

The film *Mississippi Masala* brings forth the plight of Jai, his wife Kinu and their daughter Mina, who have suffered from displacement on being thrown out of their homeland. The three characters have their own personal mechanisms of establishing new roles and identities, with a sense of belonging to their new environment.

Jai, who continues to live in a state of denial, desires to return to his home in Kampala and is unable to accept the changed circumstances that have forced him to flee Uganda and move to England and eventually to Greenwood Mississippi, United States. Having faced downward class mobility because of the expulsion, and being financially dependent on friends and relatives in Mississippi, Jai obsessively surges ahead in trying to reclaim his property back in Uganda. He pursues litigation against the Ugandan government to get back his home and property.

On the other hand, his wife Kinu has decided to move on with her life and settled in the new life that has unfolded in front of her. Not being struck by nostalgia and sense of loss, Kinu opens up a liquor store, an act that defies her image as an ideal wife and an Indian woman, just to sustain her family. Mina who has grown to see all these changes in her life has accepted them and molded herself according to the diverse lifestyle that has surrounded her from childhood. Mina, despite the objection by her
community’s sense of superiority and racism, falls in love with an African-American man, Demetrius (Denzel Washington).

The story also brings forth the issue of race and ethnicity and the discriminations that come along with it. Jai being of Indian origin is subjected to exile from Uganda (his country of birth); even though he considers himself to be Ugandan first and Indian second; but still he is unable to accept an African American man—Demetrius (Denzel Washington), as his daughter’s boyfriend. His loyalty towards Uganda is shown to be limited to the land and his lifestyle but not to its natives. When faced with the situation of accepting Demetrius, a black man from Mississippi, Jai has to relive his horror of being refused his basic rights just on the basis of the color of his skin. This time, however, Jai is on the other side.

The story further establishes the relationship between Mina and Demetrius, thus further exposing the racial prejudices and reservations that exist between the South Asian and the African American community. The presence of a ‘shadow of a color line within a color line’ (Desai 2004) shows the implications of South Asian racial identity formations. It makes visible the anti-black racism of South Asians, and brings forth
overshadowed, and often invisible, racial formation processes of South Asian-Americans themselves.⁸²

4.2 Invention of Nostalgia and its role in Identity Construction

The presence of past in the present is often the most common link found in all Diasporic communities and thus a common theme in Diasporic films. The past, which is often filled up with memories of the homeland, acts as a sustainer of childhood memories, cultural values, communal kinship and a deep sense of nostalgia. The Indian Diasporic community, through the means of cultural and religious affiliations, attempts to reconnect with the past as well as the contemporary Indian way of life—often glorifying them in return.

Home sickness may be used as a simpler synonym for nostalgia⁸³ in modern times, but in the late 17th and 18th centuries, it was believed that ‘nostalgia’ could be fatal if the ailing patient is not reunited with his home. Nostalgia emphasizes the levels of

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⁸² Jigna Desai, Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South-Asian Diasporic Films (New York: Routledge, 2004), 72. The film also explores the ways in which the racialization of (South) Asian-Americans is hidden by U.S. binary discourses of race as black and white, simultaneously producing racial discourses framing South Asians as always foreign and as near-white model minorities.

⁸³ W.H. McCann, “Nostalgia: A review of literature” in Psychological Bulletin 38 (1941), 165-182. W.H. McCann has suggested that the word ‘Nostalgia’ was coined by a Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer in 1678, to describe an illness that was characterized by such symptoms such as insomnia, anorexia, palpitations, stupor, fever and persistent thinking of home.
attachment one might feel for his/her home place. The places that may be the center of our lives may also be in a way imprisoning. There is a sheer drudgery of place, a sense of being tied inexorably to this place, of being bound by the established scenes and symbols and routines.\(^4\)

Relph (1976) claims that drudgery is always a part of profound commitment to a place, and any commitment must also involve an acceptance of the restrictions that place impose. Our experience of a place, he further states, is a dialectical one—balancing the need to stay with a desire to escape. Therefore, when one of these needs is too readily satisfied, we suffer either from nostalgia and sense of being uprooted, or from the melancholia that accompanies a feeling of oppression and imprisonment in a place.\(^5\)

The Identity of Place is as much a function of inter-subjective intentions and experiences as of the appearances of buildings and scenery, and it refers not only to the distinctiveness of individual places but also to the sameness between different places.\(^6\) The notion of Identity is fundamental to everyday life. Relph (1976) suggests that it is imperative to note the difference yet relationship between ‘Identity of’ and ‘Identity with’. Hence, the Identity of something refers to a quality of sameness or uniformity


\(^5\) Ibid, 42.

\(^6\) Ibid, 44.
that secludes this thing from others. Kevin Lynch in ‘The Image of a City’\(^{87}\) defines Identity of a place simply as that which provides its individuality and distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognition as a separable entity.

However, Ian Nairn in ‘The American Landscape’\(^{88}\) adds further that there are as many identities of place as there are people, for Identity is in the experience, eye, mind, and intention of the beholder as much as in the physical appearance of the city or landscape. Hence the manner in which a person may experience and identify with a place is more or less dictated by his/her cultural group—the kind of signs that catches his/her eyes, the kind of activities he/she indulges in, so on and so forth.

A place can extrude three basic components that constitute the formation of its Identity, namely, physical settings, activities and meanings. The meanings of places may be rooted in the physical setting, objects and activities, but they are not a property of them—rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences.\(^{89}\) Therefore, as Relph suggests, these components act as raw materials of the Identity of places, and the dialectical links between them are elementary structural relations of that Identity.


In the book, ‘Twilight memories’\textsuperscript{90}, Andreas Huyssen sees the contemporary turn towards nostalgia as a shift in utopian energies, away from a futuristic pole towards a pole of remembrance. Although ethnic Diasporic spaces that get created out of everyday activities cannot be justified to be utopian in nature, but they certainly get formed out of a nostalgic shift towards a pole of remembrance. Debate over culture, language and sites of memory can no longer be secured along traditional axes of nation and race, language and national history. Mike Savage, citing the theory of involuntary memory by the French author Proust says:

Proust argued that voluntary memory where people consciously make an effort to remember a past event, does not have the same quality as those memories which are triggered off by an particular inadvertent stimulus and which seem to envelop the person from their place in the past, so breaking the apparent boundary between past and present and bringing lost hopes and dreams to mind. For Proust, these sorts of memories are lodged in specific places where people have been.\textsuperscript{91}

Therefore, recreation of a place that resembles the homeland is often a way to stay connected with it. Inadvertently the created space tends to mold itself according to the memories of the world that has been left behind by the migrant.


4.3. Diasporic Chronotopes: Homeland as the Utopian Chronotope

Chronotopes, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), are the “organizing centers” of the films, the places where “the knots of narrative are tied and untied”. In Diasporic cinema, chronotopes link the spatial narratives with time continuum. Being a unit of textual analysis, cinematic chronotopes refer to certain specific temporal and spatial settings in which stories unfold. Bakhtin introduces the idea of the chronotope to explain the entrance of history into the space of the novel, suggesting that chronotopes locate the specific historical and material conditions within the text.

Each film may contain a primary chronotope or multiple “mutually inclusive” chronotopes, which may reinforce, coexist with, or contradict one another. These configurations provide the optics with which we may understand both the films and the historical conditions of displacement that give rise to them.

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93 Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South-Asian Diasporic Films* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 119. Cinema scholars such as Vivian Sobchek (1997) see chronotopes as characterizing the literal time-space of the narrative and the characters. She argues that the film settings are defined by contrasting chronotopes—the removed, discontinuous time-space of the nightclub versus protected private space of domesticity. The oppositional chronotopes, according to her, express the economic, political, and cultural conflicts characteristic of the postwar film noir.

94 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 153. However, Robert Stam (1991), in his study of Bakhtin and cinema states, that even though ‘chronotopes’ are related with historical reality, they are not equitable with it because they are always mediated by art.
In *Mississippi Masala*, Jai’s desire to be back in Kampala is reinstated at many instances—his attempts to get back his property in Kampala; his refusal to move on with his life in Greenwood Mississippi; and finally, his realization that the past that he lives in, is no longer relevant. The images of rich fertile Uganda often intersperse the narrative of the film; such panoramic scenes depict the way Jai fondly remembers his home.

Figure 4-1

*Nostalgia towards the homeland: Homeland metonymically becomes the family house.*
In the deterritorialized nature of the Diasporic cinematic spaces, the homeland takes the form of a utopian space filled with idyllic settings. The “idyllic chronotope”, as suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), appeals to the unity of the ancient complex and a folkloric time when everything is idyll. It is represented in a special relationship that space and time have with the idyll. This relationship is,

an organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one’s own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one’s children and their children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world. But in this little spatially limited world a sequence of generations is localized that is potentially without limit.95

The rendition of life away from home is manifested in dystopian (characterized by misery, poverty, war, dysfunctional society) and dysphoric (grief, sadness) imagining of the contemporary times.96 This is generally expressed in the form of closed chronotopes of imprisonment and panic. The chronotopes, as suggested by

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96 It is often seen that people who were unaware of their surroundings tend to become sudden nationalists upon migration. Homeland, then, no longer remains a place of birth but it transcends into a source of pride and identity.
Naficy (2001), are not just visual but also, synaesthetic, involving the entire human sensorium and memory.

Greenwood Mississippi appears barren and lonely to the eyes of Jai. There is a sort of struggle to escape the present to go back to the utopian homeland. The chronotope of the boundless homeland presents the lurking desire of Jai that defines his current identity. However, on his final return to Kampala, Jai comes face to face with reality and the return to the desired homeland no longer remains important.

Figure 4-2

Jai and Okelo shown as children playing in the resplendent Ugandan landscape; and a lifeless street in the new home –American South.
Diasporic films embody both ‘open’ and ‘closed’ cinematic forms as a way to depict utopia and dystopia. Each form has a spatial and temporal dimension. The open form is represented by external locations and open settings—landscapes, bright natural lighting, and mobile or wandering characters.\(^97\) Spatially, closed forms are represented by interior locations and closed settings; claustrophobic spaces created by dark lighting schemes. The constrictions and limitations are enhanced by blockages or barriers that hold back the perspective of the characters.

Temporally, the open forms are filled with order that support continuity, introspection and retrospection. The present is experienced in terms of a nostalgic past with a deep sense of loss and longing. The past, which often gets reconstructed in memory, undermines the importance of the present and brings along a sense of loss.\(^98\) The prelapsarian chronotope of the homeland, which is essentially, uncorrupted and untainted, forms a link to imagine the lost home. It is represented in Diasporic cinema in the form of open forms, with shots of nature, rich fertile landscapes, landmarks and

\(^97\) In terms of filming, the open forms embody long shots, mobile framing, and long takes that situate the characters within their open settings.

\(^98\) Fredric Jameson (1989) has asserted that massive displacement and globalization have forced us to express and experience time as a loss. The experiences of here and now are somehow not sufficient or real by themselves unless they are projected as loss or mediated by memory and nostalgia (Naficy, 2001).
ancient monuments. The house and home also forms a center around which sense of displacement is revisited.

Nair creates the utopian chronotope of homeland to take the narrative further. As a tool of expressing the nostalgia and alienation experienced by the characters, the scenes of the past conform to the uncertainty of the present.

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99 According to Louis Giannetti (1990, 67-71), the open and closed forms are mutually inclusive, as many films contain both. Each form can not only be distinguished by its utopian or dystopian feeling structure, but also by its style. The open form appears to be spontaneous and accidental, and can be associated with realism. It tends to connote intimacy and familiarity. The closed form, on the other hand, is conspicuous and seems to be deliberate, and can be associated with formalism. It emphasizes control, distance and unfamiliarity.

100 Exilic communities differ from Diasporic communities in terms of sense of displacement and the impossibility of return. The chronotope dealing with nature forms an important part in such exilic cases. Faced with the destruction of the homeland, the erosion of former structures and authorities of home (such as language and culture), and the impossibility of return, many exiles seem to turn to the structural authority and certainty that only nature seems capable of providing: timelessness, boundlessness, reliability, stability and universality. Diasporic cinema tends to project nature as a complex space-time unity that signifies endless possibilities and security. Nature being traditionally taken as a sacred space-time of uncorrupted spirituality, contrasts with the profane space-time of culture and civilization. On the other hand, nature also depicts itself as a place of wilderness filled with danger and adventure. The tameness‖of‖the‖wilderness‖by‖agriculture‖has‖been‖seen‖as‖a‖sign‖of‖man’s‖progress‖and‖development.‖However, the defeat of wilderness presented nature as a symbol of an earthly paradise, the place before the fall where people lived in close harmony and deep sympathy with nature. Third world civilizations, maintained an organic and direct relationship to land, nature and tradition. This relationship is informed not only by collective memory of the land and nature long lost to wars, modernity, urban sprawl, environmental degradation, and exile but also by their own phenomenological experiences of it as former villagers, farmers and tribes of people. In Diasporic films, the impossibility of return is substituted by staging a metaphoric reunion with nature and a return to wholeness depicted by imagined communities and invented traditions.
4.4. Nation and Diaspora Gendered and Racialized: Image as Conveyer of Identity

Film genres are also determined by gender and sexuality. Melodrama traditionally has been associated with women, the feminine, the domestic space, and with “emotion, immobility, enclosed space, and confinement.” The masculine space, on the other hand, is characterized by outdoors, movement and cathartic action.¹⁰¹

Originally named Twice Removed¹⁰², Mississippi Masala explores the notions of nostalgia and displacement that result from the political exile faced by the characters. Jai considers himself to be Ugandan first and Indian later, but the racial and political typecasts force him to leave Uganda and migrate to other parts of the world. It is

¹⁰¹ Laura Mulvey, “Pandora: Topographies of the mask and Curiosity.” in Sexuality and Space, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 55. However, Naficy (2001) argues that contrary to Hollywood’s tradition of relating the feminine space with melodrama and the masculine as the American West; the Diasporic film culture adopts its own space in its imaginative productions. The outside, public spaces of the homeland—nature and landscape are depicted as being feminine and maternal. The inside spaces—domestic and enclosed also get associated with the feminine. Naficy (2001) concludes that all Diasporic films, regardless of the gender of their directors or protagonists, are feminine. Another difference between a Hollywood drama and a Diasporic film setting is the space assigned for melodrama. The staircase, in Hollywood cinema, becomes the center of representation of emotional extremes, its vertical axis depicting the melodrama in the life of the characters. In Diasporic films, the staircase is replaced by open, closed and border chronotopes that express and encode the (melodrama of displacement, liminal subjectivity and hybridized identity. Diasporic films, thus, blur and negotiate the boundaries of gender, genre, and sexuality. The spatial configurations are not governed by gender or structure of identification but by the eruption of memory, sense of nostalgia and alienation, and a longing to return and resist any form of acculturation.

¹⁰² Judy Gerstel, “masala filmmaker reaches for universal themes, such as longing for home”, Detroit news, Mar 1 1992, 6G.
interesting to note here that Jai’s Indianness is the reason behind his expulsion, yet he never goes back to India. He seeks refuge in western countries such as the United Kingdom and then the United States. Been born in Uganda, Jai has no political or social connection with India. His affiliation towards being an Indian is only limited to his being part of a Gujarati community (from the western state of Gujarat, India) that runs small motels in Greenwood, Mississippi.

On the contrary, Jai’s wife Kinu has been shown to have negotiated her identity with the changing times and places. She is shown to be comfortable with owning a liquor store in the African American part of the neighborhood, at the same time she is also the one who is shown adorning traditional Indian garments and jewelry, singing Hindu hymns and Hindi film songs. The film explores the Indian exiles from Uganda and their relationship with fellow Indians living in Greenwood Mississippi in the American South.

Figure 4-3

Kinu in traditional clothes singing Hindu hymns at a wedding.
In *Mississippi Masala*, the Diasporic homeland doesn’t refer to India but to Uganda. Mina being a Ugandan-born woman of Indian descent has never been to India, and Demetrius is an African-American man who has never been to Africa. This disassociation prevents a simple construction of essentialist belonging, complicating the issue of identity because Mina and her family originate not from the expected homeland but from Demetrius’s supposed homeland (Desai 2004). Therefore, the mobility and displacement of Diasporas (the African resulting from slavery linked with the south Asian resulting from colonialism and later forced political exile) create spaces critical of nationalisms and racialized notions of authenticity and purity.\(^{103}\)

The issues of national belonging and trajectories of Diasporic displacement are brought forth along with use of familial relationships (motherland). Anne McClintock (1995) points out that the notion of nation as family uses gendered framework of configuring national belonging while naturalizing those gendered, sexual, and familial relations as ahistorical and natural. Unlike Jai’s Diasporic and masculine nationalism, his wife—Kinu’s cultural and domestic femininity is connected on the basis of familial and financial needs. The nation’s imaginings are gendered with the men bonded in a fraternity, one to which Asian men belong as cousins twice removed and Asian women belong contracted through marriage (Desai 2004). Desai (2004) has argued that

Diasporas maintain and consolidate connections and imaginings of the homeland by performing national identities through gender and sexual normativities. She has argued that hetronormativity acts as a crucial sign of belonging to a Diaspora; forming a basis for discourses of morality, cultural values, and ethnic identity.

Construction of fraternity incorporates an understanding of the ways in which the nation is imagined as a fraternity of men, but more specifically, men who are normatively constructed as heads of households consisting of racially homogeneous heterosexual families in which the men are affiliated with the nation-state and women with culture.\(^\text{104}\)

In *Mississippi Masala*, Jai’s affiliation to Uganda is different than that of Kinu’s. Also, his imagination of home also significantly different from her, where he has associated home as piece of land and social status, whereas Kinu’s vision of home is fluid and deterritorialized in Diaspora. Kinu has molded herself with the new territory for the sake of family and finances. She owns a liquor store in the African American part of the town. Her idea of home has transcended the boundaries of nation-state and has transpired into her bonding with her family.

In the earlier part of the film, Kinu along with other Asians are on a bus in Kampala which is on its way to the Airport. But the bus is stopped by Ugandan soldiers and Kinu is forced to step out of it. The soldiers question her and go through her suitcase and other belongings. These belongings contain a picture frame and stereo system that are symbols of her cultural and familial pleasure. Her suitcase contains a framed picture of Jai in his barrister garb (signifying the elite social class of the Indians);
the soldiers flip it aside and throw it in the mud—an act depicting the end of Indian elitist presence in the Ugandan system.

The second symbol of her culture is the song that gets played on the stereo system. The song, that is quintessentially associated with the Diaspora, is “mera joota hai japani, ye patloon inglistani, sar pe laal topi roosi, phir bhi dil hai hindustani...” This Hindi song which literally translates as—My shoes are from Japan, the trousers from England, the hat from Russia but my heart still belongs to India; depicts the deterritorialized cultural and national sentiments of Kinu as she prepares to leave her home.

![Figure 4-5](image)

Symbolic downfall of the elite south Asian community in Uganda: Picture of Jai in Barrister attire thrown in mud (Source: stills from *Mississippi Masala*).
Later in the same scene, the soldier uses his weapon to tear off Kinu’s *mangalsutra*, a necklace symbolizing her marriage and also her identity as a chaste Indian woman. This act posits the African male as a perpetuator of violence and cruelty against the (purity of) Asian woman. The threat reflects the anxieties regarding Asians’ social and cultural separation from Africans across the racial, class, and gender divide established by colonial rule and persisting into postcolonial independence.\(^\text{105}\) This portrayal evokes a masculine and sexually dangerous African nation-state that comes as a threat to the feeble Asian and feminine racial minority—a violation of the fraternity of the nation.

### 4.5. Harmony and clash in Culture and Identity: ‘Africa is for Black Africans’

In the earlier parts of the film, it is shown that Jai has given an interview on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) calling General Idi Amin to be evil; as a result he is imprisoned by the Ugandan police. After getting him released from jail, his best friend Okelo tries convince him to move out of Uganda. Refusing to leave, a distraught

Jai exclaims, “I was born here. I have always been Ugandan first, Indian second. I have been called a traitor by my fellow Indians. Okelo, Uganda is my home.”

**Figure 4-6**

Bidding farewell to the ‘motherland’/worshipping the homeland.

**Figure 4-7**

Printed Media declaring the expulsion of Asians from Uganda.
Figure 4-8

Symbolic expulsion of Indians from Uganda: the removal of Indian National Flag in a street in Kampala, Uganda and life size cut out of General Idi Amin.

4.6. The Westward Journey: In search of Routes in place of Roots

The West becomes space, open and imaginary, that can once again be resurrected as occupiable by a new generation. This space is sought as free from the confines of “home” that signifies a territorial national identity (Ugandan) or a deterritorialized national or Diasporic identity (African Asian or British Asian). What is constructed instead is the inscribing of space by the movement of the globally mobile individual. Mina and Demetrius, displaced by the nation’s exclusionary narratives, reactivate the possibility of America as a temporary and a transient space inscribed with the narratives of global cowboys.106

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The climax of the film results in Mina and Demetrius choosing a new path where they shall travel together, hopefully towards a better future. Instead of looking for roots in India or Uganda, the film progresses towards looking for routes in the West. As discussed earlier, the role of westerly journey is an important aspect of Diasporic cinema.

Figure 4-9

In search of routes in place of roots- Mina and Demetrius in the open American landscape wearing traditional clothing.

Early in the film, Mina and Demetrius reject the idea of self and home and instead choose to look for better territories and opportunities. At an amusement park, both shout out the names of places like Jamaica, Madagascar, and India—exotic places where they shall forge a future together. The final shot of the film shows Demetrius
and Mina standing in an open field; both in traditional clothing—Demetrius wearing a kente cloth and Mina in a traditional skirt; the traditionally garbed individuals represent the migrant sentiment that looks towards the West as a space of possibilities and recreating new stories.

The West is often symbolized as a space that is empty and uninhabited to suggest the possibility of movement and expansion, a place where one can remake oneself, an open terrain in which Identity is reconstituted, a space waiting to be “worlded”. 107 Mina’s journey begins at a motel108 in the American south and goes towards an open American road.

In the beginning of the film, the exile of the family from Uganda is cartographically represented through Africa, Europe, England and finally stopping at a Motel in the Greenwood Mississippi. When this destination becomes unsatisfactory, the migration further continues, away from Asian or African histories, towards a formulation of a new Identity.


108 Prototypically American, motels have become the entrepreneurial investments of many Gujarati immigrants. Motels, as home away from home, stand symbolically at the center of Indian American community in the film.
On discovering that time has had an effect on the landscape of his homeland—Uganda, Jai realizes that it is not the place but the people that make his home. His connection with Uganda was linked through his childhood friend Okelo who is no longer alive, his wife Kinu is in Mississippi and his daughter is also pursuing her own dreams. In his letter to his wife Kinu, Jai admits—“There is so little love in the world and yet so much. Mina was right I never said goodbye to him and now he is dead.
Since I have been back I have thought so much about you. Which is why I say to hell with the lawsuit. Home is where the heart is and my heart is with you.”

Critiquing the hybridity displayed by *Mississippi Masala*, Desai (2004) states that Mina addresses herself as a *Masala* in order to appear more appealing and exotic to Demetrius. On the other hand, *Masala* is a term that has been used for South Asian Diaspora to describe hybrid identities and subjectivities.

As a constantly varying mixture of spices, *Masala* (as opposed to the British concoction curry) may make visible its own culturally and historically contextual construction while attempting to challenge essentialist notions of purity and stasis. However, the metaphor of *Masala* particularly evokes consumable commodities with their own hot and spicy (post)colonial history. The desire for tasty, easily swallowed, apolitical global—cultural morsels or the increasing consumption in the dominant public culture of specifically South Asian Diasporic hybridity is a feature of American (and European) orientalism that rises in popularity periodically, and in this case partially undermines Mina’s self naming.¹⁰⁹

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Chapter 5: Feminine Embodiment of the Diaspora in *The Namesake*

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history…the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive ‘image’ at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, 19
The sense of longing and the confusion erupted by being placed in an unfamiliar environment are the themes that are being explored in this chapter. Focusing on Mira Nair’s *The Namesake*, I shall identify issues of nostalgia and cultural difference experienced by the Indian immigrants portrayed in the story. Although the film’s screenplay has been adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel by the same name, Nair has cleverly sculpted out portions that directly deal with the aspects of female embodiment of the Diaspora. This can be seen by the amount of emphasis given to the character of Ashima played by Indian film actor Tabu. In the original story by Lahiri, the focus is mostly on Gogol (Ashima’s son) and his journey towards exploring his cultural roots. But in Nair’s version of the tale, despite Gogol’s struggles with acknowledging his Bengali roots and heritage, the backdrop of the film silently shows Ashima’s plight and the pathos of living away from her beloved homeland.

Chronotopes, as discussed earlier in Chapter 4, surface as links to express the state of mind of the characters and take the narrative further. As was the case with Nair’s *Mississippi Masala*, the importance of journeying in the lives of immigrants is shown here as well. The chronotopes in the form of transit spaces such as airports, train stations, planes, subways, trains and even cycle rickshaws emerge at regular intervals throughout the film. Transportation and transit spaces emphasize the desire of the characters to choose an altogether different life path contrary to the one they are currently on.
The films transcends from the busy warm streets of Kolkata, India to the cold landscape of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The climate and the geography in a way replicate the alienation of the territory experienced by Ashima when she first arrives in United States. Interestingly, the same landscapes appear differently to her children when they are temporarily removed from their supposed homelands. This is in reference to the incident when during a summer holiday, Ashima with her two teenage children comes to spend the holiday with her family in Kolkata. The busy streets that once appeared warm and friendly to Ashima appear chaotic and intimidating to her American born children.

Figure 5-1

*Figure 5-1*

A still from *The Namesake*, showing the characters, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguly, taken from [www.guardian.co.uk/.../cinemaoftheindianspora](http://www.guardian.co.uk/.../cinemaoftheindianspora) (Last accessed on 05.01.09).

In the film, the recently migrated Ganguly family moves into student housing in Cambridge from Kolkata, Bengal, India. The protagonist, Ashoke Ganguly is a doctoral
student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Ashoke eventually settles for an arranged marriage and his newlywed wife joins him there from Kolkata. The story shows the progression of the immigrant family from the life of a student to a well established academician. The story further shows the life and aspirations of his wife Ashima who follows her husband to the new country and molds her Identity to the new social structure. However, the family maintains close ties with their Bengali culture and religious beliefs. They do this by being part of a strong Bengali community that acts as an extended family. The frequent social and cultural gatherings help to strengthen their bond. The story of Ashoke and Ashima, like many Indian immigrant families, reflects the struggles and aspirations of a newly migrated couple.

Being part of post 1965 generation of Indian immigrants to America, the narrative of these two individuals depicts the real life dilemmas of the wave of immigrants that migrated from India to the United States. Also, as the years pass by and the family grows, they are shown moving from humble student accommodation to suburbia. This transition from small quarters to a bigger house seems to be the most natural progression of living the “American dream”. The distinction between the Indian way of life and the American lifestyle for a new immigrant is emphasized when Ashoke’s Bengali friend exclaims “Welcome to America!” This dialogue reflects the notion of seeing America as the land of opportunities—how any person by the means of sheer hard work can achieve the luxuries in life irrespective of his background.
There is a sharp contrast in the way different generations of Diaspora react to the original homeland. The first generation immigrants hold the longing of returning to their homeland whereas the second generation struggle to identify with either of the cultures they are presented with.

The role of Bollywood music as a medium of connecting the Indian popular culture to the second generation Diaspora is highlighted in a particular scene when Gogol and his wife Moushami dance to the tunes of a remixed version of an old Hindi film song on their wedding night. Following traditional Bengali rituals in their wedding, Gogol and Moushami are mere spectators of spectacle without being interested in the actual ritual. Similarly, by dancing to a Bollywood tune, they are shown pretending to be part of the culture they have resisted their entire lives.

*The Namesake* was rated to be a commercial success in not only United States but was highly appreciated by the audiences in India as well. Nair packaged the film strategically by presenting India as the land of familial bonding, vibrant colors, the Taj Mahal and rich cultural heritage; something that stands dialectically opposite to the suburbia and sense of individualism shown as attributes of the West.

In an attempt to maintain the authenticity of the narrative, Nair researched a great deal about the life of the author—Jhumpa Lahiri and based her characters on the family members of Lahiri. Lahiri, who was born in London and raised in New England, is a first generation Indian author based out of New York. The story has been
inspired by her own life’s experiences as a second generation immigrant. The characterization of the film’s narrative with complexities created by Culture, ethnicity and the search for one’s Identity resonate with the multitude of immigrants that start a new life in a host country.

5.1. Film Narrative: *The Namesake*

*The Namesake* revolves around the lives of Ashoke Ganguly (Irfan Khan), his wife Ashima Ganguly (Tabu) and their children—Nikhil ‘Gogol’ Ganguly (Kal Penn) and Sonali ‘Sonia’ Ganguly (Sahira Nair). The film opens with the shot of a passenger train in India; a young Ashoke Ganguly is reading Nikolai Gogol’s *The Overcoat* and talking to a fellow passenger. The importance of Gogol is established here as his name shall haunt the characters for the rest of the film. Ashoke’s train meets with a tragic accident but he gets rescued when the rescue workers spot *The Overcoat* fluttering in Ashoke’s hand amidst the train wreckage. Taking this as a cue as a second lease to life, Ashoke decides to travel and ‘see the world’. *The Overcoat* coupled with the train accident is the turning point in the life of Ashoke, and subsequently the lives of his immediate family members.

The narrative quickly introduces the audience to Ashima, who is an English literature student in Kolkata, India. She will soon be Ashoke’s bride and shall travel
with him to the United States. The struggles faced by Ashima in a foreign land amidst unknown people are constantly presented throughout the narrative. Through the visuals of the bridge connecting Howrah to Kolkatta juxtaposed with the shot of the bridge connecting Brooklyn to Manhattan; Nair depicts the state of nostalgia experienced by Ashima. Her perception of her surroundings is translated through the visuals that have been familiar to her in the past. She interacts with the new world through the cognitive understanding of places and languages from her past instead of her current settings.

*The Namesake* also introduces the dilemma of Ashoke and Ashima’s first born—Nikhil, whom they call Gogol because of the significance of this name in Ashoke’s life. However, the name itself brings about a sense of confusion and identity crisis in Gogol’s life as it is the surname of an eccentric Russian writer who is not well accepted in Gogol’s American culture. Rebelling against his Bengali heritage, Gogol dabbles with drugs, has American white girlfriends, and behaves indifferently towards the Bengali culture; however, it is his link with India that he is unable to get rid of. With the death of Ashoke, Gogol takes up the responsibility of his mother—Ashima and experiences a new surge to explore and accept his Bengali identity.

He agrees to marry a Bengali girl recommended by his mother. Gogol’s wife—Moushimi (Zuleikha Robinson) is herself searching for her cultural roots. She finds her identity by not identifying with the Bengali or American culture, but by being a modern
French woman. Here, she is able to recreate and liberate herself from the norms and restrictions of being a good Bengali housewife. Gogol and Moushimi part ways soon as none of them is content with either being a Bengali or an American. The desire to choose a specific identity overshadows their choices and complicates the identity struggles.

Gogol, who rebels against his cultural roots, is shown to accept and respect them eventually; and is shown becoming more accepting of his hybrid identity. Ashima is shown to be a devoted wife and mother, who, despite her reluctance in accepting the American way of life, takes good care of her family. After ‘fulfilling her responsibilities’ as a dutiful wife and mother, she goes back to Kolkata to pursue her interest in music.

5.2. Nostalgia and the Uncanny: Gendered as the Feminine Embodiment

In psychoanalysis, heimlich (canny) refers to the familiar or homey; while the unheimlich refers to uncanny or the unfamiliar or fearful. Nostalgia, being referred to as a universal emotional and natural temporal yearning, is a recent phenomenon. Jameson (1991), critiqued ‘nostalgia films’ by claiming that such films make a spectacle out of the past, solely for mass consumption. Nostalgia films restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and
emergent ideology of the generation. Desai (2004) claims that all the Diasporic films endeavor to contest the construction of South Asian and Diasporic women as passive victims of heteropatriarchy.

Each of the films stresses some challenge to the construction of Third world women as without sexual and social agency. In this sense, the films valorize the much maligned sex worker, the sexually active single woman, the sexually abused woman, and the athletic woman with the interracial lover. These political assertions are successful within the film because, at some level, they are accepted within the framework of liberalism. Much of the feminist work in these films seeks to supplement the victimization of women in these areas (i.e. heteropatriachal control of sexuality embodiment of aspirations of class mobility, racial heteronormativity) with representation of women’s agency as they seek to invert these over determining dominant narratives. Writing against narratives of victimhood, the films target narratives of sexual agency to multiple audiences simultaneously, including one that is Eurocentric liberal feminist.

In The Namesake, the woman is shown as the dutiful wife and a mother who sacrifices her desires for the better future of her children. The first generation’s desire to produce a second and third generation that is purely and authentically Indian applies most pressure to women, who often become embodiments of tradition and therefore must replicate Indianness. According to Desai (2004), the location in Diaspora has not meant an escape from the nation-state for the Diasporic woman; instead she has become

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112 Ibid, 122.
the site on which postcolonial and metropolitan nation-states are configured and reconfigured. Spivak (1997) described the state of Diasporic women in transnationalism as,

Her entire energy must be spent upon successful transplantation or insertion into the new state, often in the name of an old nation in the new. She is the site of global public culture privatized: the proper subject of real migrant activism. She may also be the victim of an exacerbated and violent patriarchy which operates in the name of the old nation as well—a sorry simulacrum of women in nationalism.\textsuperscript{113}

Spivak (1997), here, is referring to the Diasporic woman who has to negotiate between different nationalisms, cultures, social structures, and national politics that expect her to represent the whole set of transnational women. Diasporas maintain and consolidate connections and imaginings of the homeland through performing national identities on and through women’s bodies.\textsuperscript{114} Ashima in The Namesake becomes the embodiment of the social body of the Diaspora. Her homesickness, sense of disconnect, constant negotiations and the struggle to teach her children the cultural and nationalistic sentiments, are all ways in which the Diaspora exists. Interestingly, Nair uses the original story from Lahiri and creates a screenplay by highlighting the areas that resonate well with the Indian Diasporic audiences.


Even though the cultural difference and the search of identity seem be the center of this narrative, the characters of Ashima and Gogol experience it in altogether a different manner. Ashima experiences the alienation as an immigrant woman who has been brought to a western country through marriage. Even though she has formally studied English literature, her contact with the West is practically nil. The impact of being in an unfamiliar environment forces her to adapt herself quickly to the cultural as well societal differences. However, she has been shown to be reluctant in altering herself to suit her new condition, on the contrary her presence in America is just connected to her husband’s desire to ‘see the world’; her world still remains in Kolkata, India to which she returns in the end of the film.

Gogol, on the other hand, suffers from another kind of alienation. He feels like a misfit in his own country. Being a second generation Bengali man, Gogol finds it difficult to oscillate between his Bengali identity at home and his American identity outside the home. There is strong sense of inside and outside experienced by the characters. The Namesake is also the journey of Gogol to accept his hybrid identity while acknowledging his cultural roots.
5.3. Diasporic Chronotope: Travel and Transit spaces

Chronotophs, as given by Mikhail Bakhtin, are the space time constructs that are often found in Diasporic communities. Mikhail Bakhtin proposed the chronotope (literally, “time-space”) both as a “unit of analysis” for studying texts in terms of their representation of spatial and temporal configurations and as an “optic” for analyzing the forces in the culture that produces these configurations.\(^{115}\) The Diasporic cinema, also known as the Accented Cinema\(^ {116}\) relies heavily on the significance of chronotophs as they act as connectors of the different time lines and space constructs.

Accented films encode, embody, and imagine the home, exile, and transnational sites in certain privileged chronotophs that link the inherited space-time of the homeland to the constructed space-time of the exile and Diaspora. One typical initial media response to the rupture of displacement is to create a utopian prelapsarian chronotope of the homeland that is uncontaminated by contemporary facts.\(^{117}\)

The narrative of *The Namesake* relies significantly on the emotions of sense of longingness and alienation experienced by the characters. The lens of the camera tries to capture the mindset of the characters and attempts to portray it to its audience. In a


\[^{116}\text{Accented Cinema is a term coined by scholar Hamid Naficy that denotes the cinema belonging to the third world. It includes Exilic and Diasporic cinema.}\]

particular scene in the film, the transition and sense of disconnect felt by Ashima is shown through the transition of streetscapes. The scenes shift through the busy streets of Kolkata (the hometown of Ashima in India) to the bustling streets of Brooklyn (her new adopted home in the United States) and thus show a disjuncture in the scenario. Her transition from one country to another is also shown through the sifting of architectural landmarks; such as the sun rising over the Howrah Bridge in Kolkata and setting behind the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. Apart from showing the stark change in streetscape, the frames also capture the familiarity that the protagonist seeks to find in her new surroundings.

The journeys and travels undertaken by the émigré are depicted through the third space and border chronotopes. The third space involves transitional and transnational sites such as borders, airports, trains, planes, buses, and other means of transport. There is a pattern to journey narratives based on the direction of journey, motivation for journeying, and reference to actual historical precedence.118 Describing the journeys undertaken by émigrés, Naficy (2001), states that the direction of journey has profound empirical and symbolic values that shape not only the travel but also the traveler.

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Depending on their motivation, journeys make take the form of exploration—pilgrimage, escape, expulsion, emigration or return. Journeys, real or imagined, form an important link in Diasporic films; having motivation, direction, and duration, each of which impacts the travel and the traveler (Naficy, 2001). Journeys to the West dominate the direction of most of the journeys undertaken in Diasporic films.

Diasporic journeys may not be completely spatial or territorial in nature but may be metaphorical with an attempt to take on a new identity structure. Exploration may refer to a desire to seek a homeland or one’s cultural roots and Identity. In the case of *The Namesake*, the film is based in the West; therefore, an easterly journey always brings about a sense of return or homecoming.

![Figure 5-2](image)

*The point of rupture: saying goodbyes to home.*
Vivian Sobchak (1997) refers to chronotopes as literal time-space of the narrative and the characters. The film noir, according to Sobchak, is defined by contrasting chronotopes such as the discontinuous time-space of the nightclub or hotel versus the protected private space of domesticity. Oppositional chronotopes thus represent the economic, political and cultural conflicts characteristic of a post-war film structure. In the case of Diaspora, displacement from the homeland is often projected onto the temporality of Diasporic loss. In this process, the time of homeland evoked through history, memory and nostalgia is shown by crossings of space, land and territory.

Unlike *Mississippi Masala*, mobility is not seen as a way to liberate or escape from a space; it is woven into the narrative as a mode of representing the displacement that forms part of an integral part of an immigrant’s identity.

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Figure 5-3

The images of transit in the *Namesake*. 
Figure 5-4

Sense of Place: Alienation experienced in a foreign land.
5.4. Cultural and Racial Boundaries: Inside and Outside

Issues of race and culture trouble the Gangulys despite living in a modern American suburb. The boundary between the inside and outside becomes prominent when Ashima, following her duty as a righteous Indian wife, tries to inculcate traditional Bengali values in her family. The children have to constantly adjust between their American identity outside the house, and the one they embody once within the house.

Gogol, as a way to rebel against his Indian heritage, behaves indifferently towards the Bengali culture. Being an Architect from Yale University, Gogol’s desire is to immerse himself into the broader American lifestyle. To this end, he also decides to
visit his white girlfriends’ parents for a holiday, instead of coming to spend time with his parents at home. However, during one of the social gatherings, it becomes evident to him that no matter what lifestyle choices he makes; the color of his skin binds him closely with his South Asian identity.

Figure 5-6

Inside and outside: Maxine (Gogol’s girlfriend) in a room full of Bengali people.
Nikhil ‘Gogol’ Ganguly is essentially trying to rebel against his parent’s culture and wants to assert that he is American and not Indian. Acting as a Bengali-Indian, though at times pleasing to his parents and their friends; appears to Nikhil as a superficial attempt to adorn a mask that down beneath clashes with his sense of identity.

After Ashima’s children marry and get busy in their own lives, she decides to move back to India. She defines this move as her deep seated desire for the last twenty five years, and now after fulfilling her duties as wife and a mother, she wants to follow her dreams. Interestingly, Gogol also expresses his sense of freedom when he discovers his wife Moushimi’s affair. It seems as though he married her just to please his mother, and take sides as far as his identity goes. He chose to be a Bengali after his father’s
death and left his white American girlfriend for this. However, when he leaves his wife, he realizes that he doesn’t have any more shoes to fill as he accepts his multicultural identity. He is an American but also an Indian. He can no longer deny this.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This is the space in which the question of modernity emerges as a form of interrogation: what do I belong to in this present? In what terms do I identify with the ‘we’, the intersubjective realm of society? This process cannot be represented in the binary relation of archaism/modernity, inside/outside, past/present, because these questions block off the forward drive or teleology of modernity. They suggest that what is read as the ‘futurity’ of the modern, its ineluctable progress, its cultural hierarchies, may be an ‘excess’, a disturbing alterity, a process of the marginalization of the symbols of modernity.

—Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 1994, 351
Globalization is a continuing phenomenon that continues to reshape the Indian Diaspora around the world. With the rise of transnationalism, it is much easier for people to traverse between different boundaries; making it possible for people to stay connected with the homeland even after migrating to different parts of the world. The Government of India, through its efforts of reaching out to the Diaspora, continues to nurture links of the Diasporic people with the homeland; through programs such as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Overseas Citizen Initiatives and the like. Consequently, the Diaspora is closer to the homeland more so now than it was before.

As is evidenced by the study of the Indian subjectivity in Bend it like Beckham, the location and time of creation of the Diaspora determines to a great extent the constructed Diasporic identity. Formed much prior to the Indian Diaspora in the United States; the British Indian Diaspora exhibits starkly different characteristics than its American counterpart. United Kingdom has third and fourth generation Indian immigrants; who may not have any political ties with India (and might have never even visited India); yet they sustain the Indian Identity through traditions passed on through the generations. Regionalism is more prevalent than nationalism in such older Diasporas. Homeland might be viewed as an untainted and uncorrupted utopia, which is diametrically opposite to the modern life.
From this film, it is also seen that Indian Diasporic culture in the United Kingdom still resists going beyond heteronormative ideas about gender and class. Being queer is considered a non-Indian value rather than an acceptable gender. It is perhaps seen as a way to amuse the viewer, but by raising such issues in the film, Diasporic film makers are in a way challenging and critiquing the existing norms.

A common theme that surfaced in all three films was that of Nostalgia. As shown in *Mississippi Masala*, a political exile can result in a deeper sense of loss and yearning for the homeland. Even though the narratives and the timelines explored in each movie were different from one another, a desire to return to the homeland and to cultivate an authentic Indian culture amongst the second and third generation immigrants seemed universal. Multiculturalism is also prevalent in modern day society, which at one hand produces hybrid cultures and identities, but on the other hand it also gives rise to ethnic subcultures that struggle to maintain their own unique identity.

The films produced by Diasporic film makers function both performatively and pedagogically, in that they teach rituals, traditions, and social practices; as well as identifications. It is evident that Diasporic films are ethnographic and pedagogical for multiple audiences. In addition to western audiences, viewers look at these films as a mode to learn about India and the Indian culture.
The concept of generation gap seems to be prevalent in modern day Indian Diaspora. The first and second generation immigrants have different modes of identity construction. The first generation, although lived away from the homeland, still maintained cultural and social ties with the homeland. This can be seen as a way to preserve and hold on to the culture that is familiar. For second generation immigrants, the familiarity with the original homeland exists only through the medium of their family elders. Identity fragmentation often results, as the second generation immigrant has to live and adapt to cultures from the East as well as the West.

This interstitial domain, where most émigrés reside, determine their identity which they have to constantly negotiate with the immediate space and cultures. Indian Diasporic identity, thus, is not a reflection of the Indian national identity, but it emerges from the immigrant’s choices and struggles; and is fueled by the exchange of Culture between the homeland and the adopted land.
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Appendix A
Immigration Policy and Indian Ethnic Enclaves in the U.S.

The Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed in 1965, with the objective of creating less racially discriminatory standards for entry.\textsuperscript{120} The objectives of the legislation of the Immigration Act of 1965 were plainly stated by President Kennedy’s message to Congress of July 23, 1963:

The most urgent and fundamental reform I am recommending relates to the national origins quota system of selecting immigrants...Although the legislation I am transmitting deals with many problems which require remedial action, it concentrates attention primarily upon revision of our quota system... The use of a national origins system is without basis in either logic or reason. It neither satisfies a national need nor accomplishes an international purpose. In an age of interdependence among nations, such a system is an anachronism, for it discriminates among applicants for admission into the United States on the basis of the accident of birth... But the legislation I am submitting will insure that progress will continue to be made toward our ideals and toward the realization of humanitarian objectives.\textsuperscript{121}

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Immigration bill (H.R 2580) into law and proclaimed that this was not a revolutionary bill and would not affect the lives

\textsuperscript{120} Sandhya Shukla, \textit{India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3.
\textsuperscript{121} Edward M Kennedy, “The Immigration act of 1965”, In \textit{The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} (September 1966), 139.
of millions. For Johnson, the act would simply facilitate the smooth emigration of those who wished to immigrate to America on the basis of their skills and close relationships to those who already were in the United States. However, as simple as it sounded, the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act opened the doors of America to the rest of the world and thus began a huge influx of immigrants. The number of immigrants from countries that were preferred earlier such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland decreased by more than 40 percent, and in the low quota countries, it increased tremendously. For instance, for the period of 1966-70 immigration from Hong Kong increased by 565 percent; from Portugal by 338 percent; and from India by 730 percent.122

National policy, among other factors, has been instrumental in shaping ever changing immigrant neighborhoods and enclaves throughout the world, specifically in the United States. The phenomenon has been studied and written about by numerous authors; the following excerpt by Zelinsky provides valuable insight into the emergence of hybrid cultures.

Because of the disjunctive and unstable interplay of commerce, media, national policies, and consumer fantasies, ethnicity, once a genie contained in a bottle of some

122 Sripati Chandrashekar, “A History of US Legislation with respect to Immigration from India”, In From India to America: A brief history of Immigration; problems of Discrimination; Admission and Assimilation (California: Population Review, 1982), 25.
sort of locality (however large), has now become a global force, forever slipping in through cracks between states and borders. The array of globalised commodities and practices is large and varied. It includes, in addition to dance, music, film, and television, an endless profusion of gadgets and trinkets, food and drink, clothing, hair styles, toys, jewelry, and comic books.

The second influx of Asian immigrants began in the early 1990s when there was an increased demand for skilled Information technology professionals in the United States. According to the U.S Census Bureau 2000 figures, there were 1.7 million people in the United States who claimed Indian descent. The Indian born population in the region of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania increased an astounding 167 percent to 498,000 from the period of 1990 to 2005.

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Chinese and Indians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>35,089</td>
<td>62,378</td>
<td>97,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>65,519</td>
<td>143,970</td>
<td>209,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>80,491</td>
<td>178,685</td>
<td>259,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>190,794</td>
<td>102,707</td>
<td>293,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>301,577</td>
<td>220,824</td>
<td>522,401</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>310,071</td>
<td>253,317</td>
<td>563,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>16,94</td>
<td>21,478</td>
<td>38,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30,634</td>
<td>42,663</td>
<td>73,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>45,694</td>
<td>65,928</td>
<td>111,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ-NY-PA Region</td>
<td>242,826</td>
<td>186,563</td>
<td>429,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>21,478</td>
<td>42,663</td>
<td>73,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>397,730</td>
<td>407,457</td>
<td>805,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>436,256</td>
<td>497,930</td>
<td>934,186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Micro data of the US census of population, 1990 and 2000; and the American communities survey of 2005

Immigration is a contentious issue in the United States. Most of the debates over the costs and benefits of immigration focus on less-educated immigrants who comprise the majority of new arrivals. Less attention has been paid to the smaller, but sizeable number of immigrants and temporary workers who come to U.S. with considerable skills. While roughly half of the recent arrivals never completed high school, one in five have at least a college degree, and 8 percent have a professional masters or Ph.D degree. A substantial share of the highly educated migrants to the U.S comes from China and India. Though about one in 10 new arrivals is from one of these countries,

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127 Ibid, 35.
they make up to 28 percent of college-educated new arrivals. Almost half of these migrants arrived in the last decade, and one in four came in just the last five years.\textsuperscript{128}

The Indians who have settled in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania region are highly educated, compared to the rest of the region’s population. While one-third of the native born labor force has a bachelor’s degree or higher, the proportion among Indians is two-thirds.\textsuperscript{129}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Natives</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Education of the region’s work force

Note: Source is the American’s Communities survey, 2005. Numbers are the percentage of each national-origin group which has the specified level of education.


\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 37.
In terms of language fluency, 80 per cent of Indian workers with at least a bachelor’s degree speak English fluently. The highest concentration of Indian Americans in the US is in Edison, New Jersey, where 18 percent of the population is of Indian descent.

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131 Ibid., 52.
Appendix B

Narratives from an Indian Diaspora in suburban Connecticut

With changes in foreign policy of the United States in 1960s, Asian immigrants, including Indians were welcomed to the country as scientists, medical professionals, engineers and small business owners. Sunil Bhatia in “American Karma: Race, Culture and Identity in the Indian Diaspora”, a study focusing on the Indian Diaspora in Connecticut, United States, explores the ethnographic struggles with self and identity that many middle class professional immigrants face, as they try to find a place in contemporary United States’ society. On one hand, historical conceptions of class, race and ethnicity all intermingle in different ways to shape Indian American and South Asian identity in the United States, as suggested by D. Bahri in “Between the lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality”. But on the other hand, Indian Americans have used a particular set of agentive “Immigrant Acts”, to craft their own identities and to build public discourses of how they want to be seen by the larger American public. Focusing on the suburbs, Bhatia shows how the suburbs have become the sight for

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reconstructing and negotiating one’s identity and personhood. He explores how first generation professional, middle-class Indians have been inserted into the racial dynamics of American society.

Most of the men and women of the post 1965 Indian migration, claims Bhatia, came from middle-class families and had resided in small towns and cities of India.

The salaries of the parents of these migrants were modest, but they invested heavily in the education of their children. Even though some of the family members of these migrants were wealthy, almost all of them were able to come to the United States only because they were given tuition waivers, full scholarships, teaching stipends, other fellowships by the American universities. Once these professional migrants had enrolled in American universities, they began to rely on their advanced education, educational competence, professional networks, strong work ethics, and savings to build their economic and cultural capital.\textsuperscript{134}

As Helweg and Helweg, one of the first scholars to write a comprehensive book on the life of successful Indian professionals in the United States state:

The new Indian migrants in America, in a short time, obtained a prominent or dominant position in many areas of the culture.... They have made inroads into medical, engineering, scientific, and other professional fields... Indians are evident or dominant in particular areas of business enterprise...in fact, they operate 28\% (15,000) of the nation’s 53,629 motels and hotels.\textsuperscript{135}


The motivation of the Indian migrant to move to new places has changed over time. Bhatia divides his ethnographic study into a set of open ended questions that are posed to the Indian community settled there. This methodology not only allows him to study the community as an insider but also helps him to analyze the dilemmas and perception of the community regarding their identity and culture. Most of the conversations with the participants begin with the following question: “I came to America because....” Such an open ended question sheds light on the reasons that dictated in bringing people to America as well as the cultural and familial circumstances in India that prepared them for a life in America.

The post 1965 migrants in Bhatia’s study were mainly professionals with limited incomes, and most of them had never before traveled abroad. Unlike the first wave of Punjabi working class labor migrants, these Indian migrant students were going straight into the safety of the university culture, which gave them some protection and insulation from the harsh realities of being a foreigner in American culture. The post 1965 generation was part of a traditional set up where the parental generation in India, encouraged their children to lay emphasis on higher education in math and sciences. It was believed that such kind of education would prepare them well for a competitive environment in India as well as abroad. Thus, this generation of professionals, mostly

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middle class, had a smooth and unproblematic transition from an Indian way of life to the American culture, much different from the one faced by low skilled working class migrants. The seeds of the Indian Diaspora were sown in India, but the maps, routes, and histories of the Indian Diaspora in suburban America lie in the towns, streets, and gullies (narrow lanes) of Indian cities and towns.\textsuperscript{137} The life in India prepared the people for the life in abroad.

Appendix C

Through the medium of selected Indian Diasporic cinema, the research envisages to explore the Indian Diasporic Identity for the migrant individual. Amongst its multifaceted identities cultural, social, gendered, historical, religious, political, national and now transnational, the Indian Diaspora has encompassed various modes of identity construction. The Indian Diaspora imprints its unique yet hybrid identity on places that it occupies, initiating such places to act as catalysts of identity construction.

Focusing on three selected Diasporic films ‘Bend it Like Beckham’, ‘Mississippi Masala’ and ‘The Namesake’, I seek to follow the lives of the characters that represent the Indian migrant individual. The reel spaces along with the real space synergistically assert the boundaries of culture, class, gender and nation. The heteronormative structures that often get associated with the Indian Identity shall also be questioned and critiqued. The discussion shall be supported by postcolonial discourse on migration, Diaspora and transnationalism. It is argued that the medium of Diasporic cinema expresses, creates, represents and sometimes shatters the existing identities.

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School of Architecture and Interior Design, College of Design Architecture Art and Planning, University of Cincinnati