

Role of Television in the Formation of Transcultural Identities

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ABSTRACT

Negotiations of identity and conceptualisation of home has become a dynamic and complex process for people living in geographical locations different to their homeland. To overcome the trauma of geographical and cultural dislocations caused by migration, the diasporic communities cling on to the memories of their original homes. The advent of the satellite television channels enables them to view ethnic media programmes and maintain ties with their homeland. Simultaneously, they find it impossible to insulate themselves against the mainstream media they encounter in their everyday lives which familiarize them with the local culture. The global media also offer them an objective view of the world. This paper explores the impact of these diverse cultural interactions on the identity formation of the diasporic community.

For this purpose, six Indians who had migrated to the United States were chosen as the target group. In-depth interviews were conducted through e-mails/telephone/Skype/FaceTime to collect data regarding their television viewing habits. Analysis of the data showed that although ethnic programmes aired through satellite television satisfied their longing for “home”, the interviewees soon realized that it did not have much relevance to their lived experiences. The data also revealed that they were drawn into watching American and transnational television programmes that familiarised them with the western culture. The main argument presented in this paper is that television provides the diasporic communities a space for negotiating cultures and helps in creating their transcultural identities.

Keywords: Diaspora, media, multiculturalism, transcultural identities

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim of the Paper

The global flow of capital and commodities, advanced transportation and new technological innovations has led to massive migratory movements of various categories of people across national and continental borders. The term diaspora which has been used in association with the phenomena of displacement, dispersal and migration since ancient times, is currently applied to refer to these transnational communities. The enormous flow of migrants is now matched by an equally

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extraordinary rise in the global flow of images, narratives and information through media. The representations and meanings circulated by the media play a vital role in shaping the diasporic identity.

Transnational subjects are often caught in the intersections of multiple and contradictory cultures and do not feel at home anywhere. Negotiation of identity and conceptualisation of home becomes a dynamic and complex process for people occupying the borders. Modern media technologies play a crucial role in minimising the anxiety and unfamiliarity experienced by the diasporic population. Television, one of the most powerful media, helps to bring the native culture closer, familiarise them with the local community while simultaneously offering a view of the global society. Thus, the television provides the diasporic population the possibility of navigating seamlessly through diverse worlds to create a “placeless culture” (Meyrowitz, 1986) in which to anchor their floating lives. As Hall (1994) puts forth, the media offer “an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of diasporas.” This study concentrates on the everyday television consumption of the Indian diaspora in the United States (US) with a particular focus on how their television viewing patterns help in the process of negotiating a borderline existence and creation of a transcultural identity.

The Indian diaspora is a vast demographic configuration that spreads across several countries and continents. It would be beyond the scope of any project to capture the whole picture. As such, this present study has confined itself to the Indian diaspora in the US. This Indian diaspora was chosen because it is estimated to be the largest in the world.

For the purpose of this study, six people who had migrated from India to the US with their families were chosen as the target group for the study. The researcher personally knows these people and e-mailed a questionnaire to them. The questions asked were as follows:

1. What is your television viewing pattern? How much time do you spend watching TV?
2. Do you watch ethnic programmes on satellite television? If so, is there any specific content that you look for? Do you have any preference over any media genre or content? How do you react to the content of the programmes you watch? Do they have any relevance to your life in the US? Do these programmes help you to connect to your motherland?
3. How does the younger generation relate to such programmes? Do these programmes help the children to establish links with their roots, culture and mother tongue?
4. Do you get to watch the mainstream television programmes? If so, do they help you understand the host culture? Do they help you in integrating into the mainstream society?

Before analysing the data and arriving at a conclusion, the paper will review some literature on the research topic. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the key

concepts used in the article. The Methodology section will outline how the research was carried out and data was collected. The respondents' experiences in the new world, even as they cling on to the memories of their homeland, are provided as background information that is essential for an understanding of their television consumption. This is dealt with under the heading "Contextualising the Indian Diaspora".

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hamid Nacify's book, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (1993) is a study of television programmes produced by the Iranian diasporic community in Los Angeles in the 1980s. Nacify made a detailed case study to demonstrate the growing importance of minority television cultures to the overall structure of US mainstream television. The book serves as a model on how immigrant media and communication productions can resist and oppose domination by the host culture while simultaneously allowing personal and cultural transformation and acculturation to those values espoused by the host culture.

Stuart Hall, in his seminal essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1994), discussed at length the vital role played by "Third Cinemas" in the formation of the Afro-Caribbean cultural identities and diaspora hybridity. Hall is a cultural theorist and sociologist from Jamaica who has lived and worked in the United Kingdom since 1951. He has contributed immensely to the school of thought that is now known as "British Cultural Studies". Hall pointed out that the Afro-Caribbean identity has been shaped by the African culture, the dominant European culture and the culture of people like Indians who had migrated in large numbers to the Caribbean under the British rule. As postcolonials, the Afro-Caribbean communities try to revert to their original African identities. Hall argued that as the identity is not fixed and static, the Afro-Caribbean communities cannot reclaim their original African identity. Instead, they will have to don a transcultural identity which will empower them to challenge cultural hegemony. Hall posited that the emerging new cinema in the Caribbean called the "Third Cinemas" will play a crucial role in the identity formation of the Afro-Caribbean community. He viewed cinema "... not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak" (1994 : 402). Thus Hall's essay established media as a powerful tool in the construction of transcultural identities.

Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change (1995: 22-23) by Marie Gillespie focused on "TV Talk" of adolescent British Asians (mainly Punjabi Sikhs) living in Southall, London. The central concern of the book was how TV talk –"the embedding of TV experiences in conversational forms and flows" was implicated in "the translation/transnationalisation of cultures and identities. Gillespie collected material for the book over a period of two years by visiting families to record their TV talk, discussing with her students and listening to conversations among the youth of Southall. Her major contribution here has been in championing ethnographic methodology as an important research tool in cultural and media studies. Gillespie arrived at a conclusion

that TV talk provides young people resources to mediate among the native culture, the dominant culture and the global teen consumer culture to construct British Asian identities through the process of self-narration and cultural translation.

Diaspora, Identity and the Media: Diasporic Transnationalism and Mediated Spatialities (2006) by Myria Georgiou is a well-researched study on the role of minority and mainstream media in the construction of diasporic identity and community. Georgiou carried out an in-depth study of the media consumption of the Greek/Greek Cypriot communities in the two global cities of London and New York using the ethnographic methodology. She observed that the Greek/Greek Cypriot found it impossible to not consume media even if they had no personal compulsion for choosing them. Conversations at work place or in other public places and preferences of other members of the family meant that the diasporic media contributed substantially to the everyday living and identity negotiation of individuals. The concluding chapter of the book addressed diasporic transnationalism. Georgiou pointed out that the diasporic community exists in a state of liminality that lends them a perspective beyond the nation state and helps in the cosmopolitan understanding of the self and their community.

The heightened interest in the role of media in transcultural identity formation has led to the publication of a host of research papers on the topic. This paper aims to study the role of television in the identity construction of the Indian diaspora in the US.

At this juncture, it is imperative to describe some key concepts that form the theoretical basis for this study.

2.2 Key Concepts: *Diaspora, Identity, Media and Identitarian Politics*

2.2.1 *Diaspora*

The term diaspora, meaning ‘to scatter’, was originally used to describe the experiences of the Jews who were exiled from Palestine in the first century after Christ. Since then, its application has been widely expanded to include any group which has migrated away from its homeland. In the writings of postcolonial and cultural theorists, the notion of diaspora has lost some of its historical and material edge. They are generally concerned with the idea of cultural dislocation contained within this term. William Safran (1991) in the introductory issue of the journal, “*Diaspora*” enumerated the conditions necessary to be a member of a diaspora. One of them is that the ancestral homeland is regarded as the true, ideal home and the place to which the members of the diaspora or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are appropriate. Though it may not be possible for the members of a diaspora to actually return home, wherever their dispersal has sent them, they retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to the traditions, customs, values, religions and languages of their ancestral home. Home may be far removed in time and space but they constantly return to it through an act of imagination. They construct what Rushdie (1991) calls, “imaginary homelands”.

2.2.2 Identity

If home is conceived as an ambivalent location, the liminal position of the diaspora has raised some interesting questions regarding identity. Hall (1994) who has played an influential role in defining the concept of diaspora focuses on demolishing the essentialist theories that view identity as being stable, single or pure. For him, diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves through transformation and differences. According to Bhabha (1994), “Hybridity” is central to the diasporic identity and in *The Location of Culture*, he dealt at length with the creation of a cultural identity that evolves in the ambivalent and contradictory space which he calls the “Third Space of enunciation”. Avtar Brah (1997:209) called “diaspora space” the intersection of borders where all subjects and identities become “juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate, and where the accepted and transgressive imperceptibly mingle ...” These cultural critics emphatically state that diasporic identities are constructs.

2.2.3 Media

As already mentioned in the introduction, diasporic identities that emerge from these interstitial places are constructed and shaped by the consumption of media images. Appadurai’s (1996) work, *Modernity at Large*, provided a new framework for cultural studies. He considered the way images circulate globally through media to construct deterritorialised identities. Grounding his arguments on Benedict Anderson’s theory that “print capitalism” was instrumental in forging the “imagined communities” that form nations, he postulated that transnational or postcolonial diasporas are “imagined” through the images produced by mass media. By affixing the suffix ‘-scape’ to coin the word “mediascape”, he indicated that media is a construct influenced by historical, linguistic, and political situations. ‘Mediascapes’ refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, etc.), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world; and to the images of the world created by these media. These images flow across the world blurring boundaries to create new cultural geographies and transcultural identities. As Gillespie (1995:19) observed, “translated cultural identities are the inevitable consequence of the simultaneous globalisation of media communications and growth of migration and transnational diasporic communities.”

2.2.4 Identitarian Politics

Following the lifting of restrictions on race-based immigration in the 1950s and 1960s, Asians and Americans began to migrate in large numbers to the Western metropolitan centres. Prior to the 1960s, the West believed in homogenised societies formed by the blending of different cultures. In America, the metaphor of the ‘melting pot’ symbolised the mystic potency of the great democracy where people from different nationalities would be fused into a harmonious and admirable blend. However, with

the steady inflow of non-whites, the ‘melting concept’ failed. Ideally, this should have encouraged the learning of other cultures in order to enhance understanding, mixing and mutual enrichment resulting in one common culture. Instead, the ethnic minorities were compelled to subscribe to the dominant, mainstream culture, thus erasing their ethnic identities. When they resisted and challenged such a move, the ‘melting pot’ theory was replaced by multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism endorses the essentialist theory of cultures being unique and pure. It dismisses the idea of a universal culture to underscore that there can only be a plurality of different cultures either tolerantly coexisting or violently excluding each other. This conception forms the very core of what is called “identitarian politics” – a political practice which decisively shapes the Western world today. Categorisation of ethnic groups has become an important mode in multicultural societies for legitimising marginality. By sticking ethnicity labels on people, they are denied their rights to integrate into the host culture. This emphasis on the otherness of other cultures suggests a veiled version of what Said (1978) called “Orientalism”.

The cultural hegemony of the Western societies is contested from within by the presence of diaspora spaces. The transcultural nature of diasporic identities dislodges the false notions of cultural purity and authenticity perpetuated by the West to marginalise and ghettoise ethnic minorities. The importance of hybridity and transculturalism was recognized and acknowledged by Bhabha (1994 : 209). He wrote,

“... the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture ... And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our own selves.”

3. METHODOLOGY

To validate the hypothesis that the television plays a vital role in the formation of transcultural identities of the diasporic people, six people who had migrated from India to the US with their families were chosen as the target group for the study. They are people personally known to the researcher and hence she had thorough knowledge of their personal stories, experiences of migration and life in the US. Data regarding their television viewing habits and their impact on their lived experiences had to be collected; and ethnographic interview was considered the most appropriate method to do this. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:7) explained, ethnographic interviews endeavour to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, are flexible, open-ended and enable the researcher to see things from multiple perspectives. The interview questions, though unstructured, were designed to elicit comprehensive answers. The answers were obtained through e-mails and whenever clarifications were needed, it was done through telephone conversations/Skype/FaceTime.

While dealing with identity formations, it is important to introduce self-conscious

individuals whom Cohen (1994: 65) described as “someone who can reflect on her or his experience of and position in society, of “being oneself”. He said “the imperative should be to elicit and describe the thoughts and sentiments of individuals which we otherwise gloss over in the generalisations” (Cohen, 1994: 4). The basic qualification of all the six participants is an undergraduate degree from reputed Indian universities and all of them are proficient in English and their respective mother tongues. Hence they were able to analyse the questions thoroughly and provide meaningful responses. This has rendered the study effective and productive.

Care was taken to ensure the target group was as heterogeneous as possible. The group comprised of participants whose age ranged from 33 years to 61 years. They come from the different linguistic states of India and migrated with their families to the US between 1984 and 2006. Today, they reside in various locations spread across the US. The following briefly describes the participants:

Chandu is from Tamil Nadu, a southern Indian state. She migrated to the US in 1981 as a young bride. She is now 58 years old and lives in Edison, New Jersey with her husband and son. She has a full-time job as an administrative executive at a corporate house. Jeyanthi too is from Tamil Nadu. She was teaching at a college before she went to the US with her husband and two sons. 48-year-old Jeyanthi is the only Christian in the group, all others being Hindus. She lives with her family in Philadelphia and works from home. Mani is a graduate engineer from Tamil Nadu. He went to the US in 2004 to do his MS degree. He currently works in an IT firm in Indianapolis. He is a bachelor and the only male member of the group. He is 33 years old. Malavika who is from Karnataka in South India has been residing in the US since 1990. Her family comprising of her husband, son and daughter live in Lancaster, California. She is 57 years old and takes care of the administrative work at her husband’s hospital. Mangla is the only North Indian from Gujarat. She came to US in 1992 to join her husband who ran a business in Bay Area, California. 61-year-old Mangla is a homemaker and has a married daughter. Saraswathy from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, who is now 42 years old, migrated to the US in 2006 along with her husband, two teenage daughters and parents-in-law. She now holds a part-time job with a local university in Chicago where she resides.

Questions regarding television viewing habits were e-mailed to the above respondents on 12 December 2012. Within a week or two, all of them responded. Over the next four months, they were contacted regularly over telephone/Skype/FaceTime for clarification and other background information. The data collected threw light on their television viewing habits. Every day, the respondents spent on average three to five hours watching television programmes. Indian channels like *Vijay TV*, *Sun TV*, *Sun News*, *Zee TV* and *Jaya TV* were their favourites. They also occasionally watched programmes on *Doordharshan*, the official channel of India. The researcher could not detect any television viewing preferences of the respondents related to their age and lifestyle. While Malavika and Mangla are avid viewers of serials, Chandu showed more interest in reality shows. Saraswathy loves surfing while Mani and Jeyanthi never missed the news channels.

The open-ended interview questions provided the interviewer much room for manoeuvre and flexibility. She was able to gather unintended but valuable information related to the respondents' personal histories, experiences of migration, identity and belonging. This background material has been useful in contextualising the Indian diaspora which is dealt with in the next section.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Contextualising the Indian Diaspora: Life On the Borders

Juneja's (1995:43) observation of an immigrant as "... a product of two or more social worlds poised in psychological uncertainty of these worlds", best describes the Indian diaspora members interviewed in this study. They have come to the US to pursue their dreams of better living, upward mobility and financial stability. The new world does not disappoint them. It offers those liberating spaces and new opportunities to redefine themselves. However, the trauma caused by the geographical dislocation and cultural alienation hinders immigrants' integration into the host society. They cling on to the memories of the lives they have left behind when coming to the US for psychological support. They develop false notions of home as being stable and fixed and try to replicate it in the new world. Although they are aware that it is impossible to make a U-turn and return home, they still create and nurture the myth of return. This explains the responses of the respondents which appeared confused and muddled at times. It is here that the media come to their rescue. The media fulfil the diasporic communities' longing and desire for home by helping them establish links, either real or imaginary, with their native land. As it now becomes apparent that the media are closely linked to the respondents' cultural feelings, it is important to record the confusions and paradoxes they experience in order to obtain a contextualised understanding as to why the media are crucial to the diaspora identity construction.

4.2 Misconceptions about Home

All the participants of this study, without any exception, misconceive home as something stable, static, fixed and culturally bound. They make every effort to transfer their ancestral homes to the new world and ensure their children get exposed to a lot of Indian culture. Most of them are into *Bharatanatyam*, Carnatic or Hindustani music and Sloka classes. Some of them attend Sanskrit classes conducted in temples. Chandu, who lives in Edison, New Jersey, jubilantly announced, "the place really doesn't represent the US local culture. It is like being transplanted in a "Little India" right in the middle of New Jersey". To substantiate her statement, she explained that little Pragathi Guru from Edison was one of the finalists at the Airtel Super Singer contest, a very popular talent hunt show in Tamil aired by *Vijay TV* where the best singers in the subcontinent participate. Jeyanthi when asked if being a Christian made her more westernised, she vehemently denied such a suggestion: "We were Christians even when we were in India and coming to the US does not alter our Indianness". Her family prays in Tamil and they never miss an opportunity to attend services conducted

in Tamil at the local church in Philadelphia. Saraswathy is the latest migrant having come to the US in 2006. Her family's home in Chicago is a replica of their lifestyle in India. There is a joint family, three generations living under the same roof. She cooks three elaborate meals every day that include Indian menus, does the cleaning and washing in addition to holding a part-time teaching job at a University; economically mandated by the exorbitant medical expenses of her mother-in-law. This tendency of the respondents to cling on to their original homes concurs with Brah's (1997:143) statement that "home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination".

4.3 Myth of Return

A paradox uniformly exhibited by all the respondents is their obsessive yearning to return home although they confided during the course of the interviews that their lifestyles and cultural practices have changed drastically and they feel incompatible with lives back home. Malavika had recently invested in a property in Bangalore, hoping to settle there sometime. She imagines that the years she had been away from Bangalore would disappear and she would effortlessly settle into the familiar environment. Other respondents too expressed similar sentiments. Most of their statements were punctuated with the word 'return'. Saraswathy hopes her daughter would get admission into the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) so that it would provide her with an opportunity to return home for a few years. To all of them, the word "return" denotes a sense of the past, a life that they had left behind. They imagine it to be something fixed and stable waiting to be occupied. As Shi (2005:61), while writing about the Chinese diaspora in the US, commented "it is the very feeling of being uprooted from the past and the difficulty of identifying with it in a foreign country that re-creates the endless desire to return to 'lost origins'".

4.4 Identity Shifts

All the respondents consciously or subconsciously subscribed to the essentialist theory of identity as being culturally pure and authentic. The protection of cultural authenticity as defined by linguistic distinctions emerged when the respondents essentialized distinctions between the different subgroups. During the interviews, sentences like "my Tamilian friend and I" or "my Bengali neighbour" or "my colleague who is a Keralite" occurred quite frequently. Mangla is the Treasurer of the Gujarati Cultural Association of Bay Area, California and the other five respondents are also members of local organisations affiliated to their communities. But these speaking positions were not always constant and paradoxically, all the respondents effortlessly steered through various imagined boundaries during their discourse on identity. They frequently made references such as "we Indians" or "back in India". Mangla even went a step further to identify herself with the Pan-Asian community. Her daughter is married to a Filipino American and when asked how it felt to have a foreigner in the family, she quickly clarified: "Zack is an Asian. He and his family share many cultural similarities with us. So we don't consider him a foreigner". Mainsah (2009:87) observed a similar tendency in the Cameroonian diasporic members

in Norway who change identification between being Cameroonian, being African, or being immigrants. He attributed it to their basic understanding of themselves as the constitutive “other” against the dominant culture.

The diaspora’s insistent longing to maintain links with their country of origin should not be misconstrued as a nostalgic effort to root their identities and moor their lives in the past. The paradoxes that have been alluded to in the preceding analysis demonstrate the fluid and volatile nature of diasporic identities. In fact, the backward glance becomes a launching site from where diasporic identities travel through mobile and fixed homes, across transnational spaces to negotiate differences and evolve into transcultural forms. While delineating the transnational construction of a Macedonian identity, Danforth (1996) observed that diasporas do not look back in a nostalgic effort of recovering or maintaining their identity but effectively discover (or construct) notions of “who they are” and “what home is” and essentially move forward. Radhakrishnan (1996), when stressing the importance of cultural mediation as a vital tool in resisting assimilation and challenging the hegemonic tendencies of the dominant culture, asserted that transculturalism alone will help the diasporic people to achieve the twin purpose of affirming themselves and demystifying the so-called “mainstream”. He argues that this task is unthinkable unless ethnicity is coordinated as a “critical elsewhere” in active relationship with the *status quo*.

4.5 Role of Television in Diasporic Lives

4.5.1 Ethnic Media and Home

Ethnic programmes made available through satellite television offer a universal panacea to the diasporic population occupying the “third space” and experiencing the existential angst of not belonging anywhere. This is the sentiment expressed by all six respondents, though in varying degrees of intensity. As first-generation immigrants, they have an insatiable desire to establish contact with their home country and this accentuates the importance of ethnic media in their lives. Malavika was euphoric in her reactions. She felt a window has been thrown open for ‘India’ to make an entry into her drawing room in Lancaster. Mangla is addicted to the programmes telecast on *Zee TV*. They both agreed that the serials they watch are mere ‘crap’. It is not the contents that attract them but listening to their mother tongue and watching familiar landscapes unfold before them revive memories of their past life and provide continuity and coherence to their fragmented and fractured identities. Mani records the episodes in the programme *Kana Kaanum Kaalangal* that deals with the adolescent lives of students and watches them on returning home after work. He reminisced, “I love the programme. It’s like being back in Chennai and enjoying my college life. Those were good old days”! Saraswathy averred that her mother-in-law’s feelings of insecurity and alienation caused by her lack of knowledge in English is minimised by her ethnic media consumption. The images and imaginative representations of her life back home provide her an ontological security. Jeyanthi enjoys programmes that have historical significance. Attenborough’s movie “*Gandhi*” is telecast every year by the Indian national channel, *Doordharshan* on Gandhi’s birth anniversary. She never

tires of watching it year after year. Independence Day and Republic Day Parades that are telecast live on Indian channels are her must-view programmes. For Jeyanthi, positioning herself in the narratives of the past is a source of confidence and security in an alien atmosphere. Chandu and Mangla admitted that ethnic media programmes provide them with common topics of interest while chatting on networking sites with friends and relatives back home. Chandu confessed, “it makes me feel as if am still there, a part of the family.” In their case, ethnic media help to construct a symbolic sense of belonging.

From the foregoing analysis, it is apparent that ethnic media satisfies the participants’ nostalgic longing for a life that they have left behind in their journey to the West. But diasporas are not given communities, an extension of a national group. Hence, the participants’ reaction to the ethnic media content is not the same as those of the viewers in India. This is dealt with in the next section.

4.5.2 Ethnic media and lived experiences

Ethnic media may enable immigrants to retain an emotional bond with their homeland that imposes an imaginary coherence on their lives in the West but paradoxically, when viewed in the context of what Ahmed (1999) called “the lived experiences of locality”, it exposes the spatial separation that exists between the context in which they are produced and consumed. For the diasporas, the world viewed on the television is not seamlessly connected to the world outside as it would be for the viewers in India. The diasporic world is a mediated one. This became evident in Mangla’s reaction to the core theme of some of the serials she watches. She finds the clashes between dominant mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law or vice versa or parents slapping their errant offspring unreal and melodramatic. With no relevance to her life in the US, Chandu felt that watching news about home is like watching dramas: “I feel disconnected with Indian news unless it is something like Anna Hazare’s crusade against official corruption or the mass movement against the Delhi rape case that evoked global response”. Saraswathy said her father-in-law and husband regularly watched ethnic news channels. Regarding her interest, she said that news about politics does not really affect her because she is not interested. She added a corollary, “But the news about the demise of the Delhi rape victim or the suicide of the popular Carnatic music singer, Nithyashree’s husband affected me as I was able to relate to these news items on a personal level”. Mani, on the other hand, very diligently follows what is happening in India on the news channels but only as an onlooker viewing the incidents objectively from his position in the West. Aksoy and Robins in their study on the TV viewing habits of the Turkish migrants in London observed a similar pattern in their approach to ethnic media programmes. They wrote, “Turkish TV broadcasts both become part of everyday domestic life in London and simultaneously also appear to be divorced from their surroundings” (quoted in Hollows, 2008:111). As stated earlier, the diasporic viewers experience a geographical and temporal dislocation between the programmes produced in India and consumed in the US. Hence, it can be argued that the ethnic media also subvert the diasporas’ sense of identification and belonging to their homeland to initiate the adjustment process with the local culture.

4.5.3 Mainstream Media

During the course of conversations with the respondents, it was revealed that their children, as second-generation immigrants, are avid viewers of American and transnational television programmes. Having integrated into the mainstream culture, they do not share their parents' anxiety for maintaining ties with their motherland. Moreover, they are not well-versed in their respective mother tongues. These factors have an impact on their television viewing habits. All the respondents concurred that their children evince no interest in ethnic media programmes though some of them do watch Indian movies occasionally. Malavika said her children watch Indian pictures when their other Indian friends had commented well on them. While it is mere entertainment for her son, for her daughter, it is more so to update herself on the latest fashion trends in India. Mani had his own explanation as to why Indian movies do not attract the younger generation: "Ethnic movies are not attractive for kids abroad because they are not familiar with the song/dance sequences that are an integral component of Bollywood pictures". All the children, without any exception, watch a lot of serials, soap operas and movies telecast by the mainstream channels. Hodkinson (2011:217) while commenting about the Indian diaspora's cultural encounters in UK wrote, "the younger generation enjoyed a range of youth-oriented elements of UK and transnational popular culture, including soap operas such as *"Neighbours"*, the plots and characters of which were intricately drawn into the everyday contexts of their own lives and identities".

It is interesting to note here that the television viewing habits of their children influence the respondents' viewing patterns too. Chandu admitted that very often, she gets "sucked" into the programmes her children watch. Others concurred with her admission and Jeyanthi added that these programmes help her to understand the mainstream culture. It was Saraswathy's elaborate account that clearly and explicitly explained the impact of local television programmes on the immigrants' perceptions of their lives on various levels. As mentioned earlier, she is the latest entrant to the US and her two daughters were teenagers when they first arrived. So she was able to perceive the changes more visibly. To quote her verbatim: "I do see the difference in all of us mostly in attitudes and mindsets. Boundaries of what is right and wrong are getting blurred. I'm not sure if it's for good or bad, as I do see many positives in the value system here too. We do watch a lot of local programmes on TV. I watch House, Monk etc. and movies. My girls watch a lot of movies and serials too. Yes, this exposure to the host culture through watching the local programmes has mainly contributed to the mindset change I was talking about. "This is my life" is something that is seeping into the children, and to pursue their dreams/desires regardless of family and circumstances is a direct result of watching the host culture. Dress codes, morality, what is acceptable, what is not - everything changes when you get exposed to different attitudes/value system day after day, right in your living room. But caught in a transition, I find it scary."

The diasporas' nostalgic connections to their homeland should not be overemphasised. It is only one aspect of their life. The confusions and paradoxes they

exhibit are a result of their constant engagement with identity negotiations. They do not live in cultural isolation. Having experienced dislocation, they are engaged in an intense search for and negotiation of identity. Scannell (1996:91) observed that by compressing time and space, the media offer “new possibilities of being in two places at once”, that is, the place where the content is produced and the place where it is consumed. It is also possible to extend this observation further and argue that the media open up new spaces where the interaction of diverse cultures takes place. It is precisely at this point that ethnicity is erased and transcultural identities emerge.

5. CONCLUSION

Satellite television channels enable the Indian diaspora in the US to gain access to the ethnic media programmes produced in India. In addition to watching mainstream television programmes, the Indian community in the US now enjoys the added opportunity of viewing ethnic media. The study reveals that this relatively new phenomenon, a development of the last decade, has significant implications on the identity formation of the Indian diasporic members.

Experiences of migration have left the Indian diasporic members confused and muddled. Believing that their ancestral home to be their true home, they try to replicate it in the new world. They develop and nurture myths of return. The ethnic media offer stability to the diasporic population groping within a life of paradoxes by facilitating them in experiencing their native culture within the host society. It helps them to keep abreast of the happenings in their home country. However, it should not be misconstrued that the ethnic media acts as a deterrent to the acculturation of the diasporic population. Instead, it provides them with an opportunity to engage in a comparison of cultural differences. They are also able to re-evaluate their native culture from their experiences in the new country.

The diasporic members do not live in isolation. Hence, they find it increasingly impossible to insulate themselves from the mainstream media they encounter in their everyday lives. They are drawn into watching the mainstream television programmes that help familiarise them with the host culture, its history of social practices and a multitude of other elements. The transnational channels give them a better worldview. The television brings into the drawing room, images, narratives and discourses of the native, mainstream and global cultures. Consequently, it initiates a dialogue between cultures.

Participation of immigrants in a dominant society should not be viewed as a linear movement, treading either the path of assimilation or exclusion. Diasporic identities are not simply situated on the assimilation-exclusion continuum. Instead, they occupy the in-between spaces that are continuously negotiated and remade in response to diverse cultural and social discourses. Television plays a vital role in the creation of such spaces – spaces from where diasporic transcultural identities emerge.

The advent of television satellite channels is a relatively recent phenomenon in the lives of the diasporic communities. There is a clear need for better quantitative data on the access and use of these channels and their relationship with the mainstream media.

The content analysis of the materials received from diasporic communities as well as ethnographic research will go a long way in helping to construct a fuller picture.

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