

# THE THIRD CULTURE SPACE: LIMINAL CULTURAL IDENTITY OF INDIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS IN UAE

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## ABSTRACT

Indians began emigrating to Gulf countries in 1970's – the era of the discovery of oil. When people move from one geographical or political border to another, they carry culture and traditions of homeland. In the host land, migrants develop nostalgia towards homeland and reminisce it through culture, traditions and material objects associated with homeland. This research applies theory of transnational cultural hybridity to understand the adaptation of migrants' moving cultural identities; in this case, women Indian diaspora in the UAE. Women are considered to be cultural torchbearers in migrant population; the paper assesses how they inhabit in the dichotomous and liminal third space of culture. It is understood they ascertain the 'third space' and are seen to be 'longing' for homeland by bringing back fragments of India in the form of spices, religious symbols and attire and temporary migration triggers intense longingness.

**Keywords:** Migration, Indian Diaspora, Third Culture, Women migrant, Transnational Culture, Cultural Hybridity, Indian Women

## INTRODUCTION

The temporary or permanent movement of individuals or a group of individuals from one geographic or political location to another for reasons such as employment is called voluntary migration and escape of persecution is called involuntary migration (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). An example of migration at a smaller level is of the movement of nomads in deserts seeking oases and farm labourers seeking employment across different agricultural regions. Indians started migrating in the 1800s- usually with the Western traders for work. Post-independence, Indians began flying out to countries in the Gulf, America, countries in Europe and so on. Indians settled in different countries are addressed as ‘Indian Diaspora’- Indians who moved to other countries for economic benefits.

As people move across one geographical or political borders- transnationally, they take with them the culture, traditions, rituals and some material objects as well. This helps them stay connected to their roots and feel attached to the home country (Bhabha, 1994). They try and intersperse within individuals or groups of individuals who hail from India or from one particular region by filling the void of nostalgia- defined as a feeling of longing for the motherland.

As the feelings of nostalgia is evident on one hand, there also comes exposure to the cultural elements of the host society. Migrants involuntarily or voluntarily witness popular culture of the host country and they consume them. According to theorists, it is not quite possible to carry all the cultural elements of the homeland, nor completely refrain from consuming the cultural traits of the host land, this space of meeting of two different cultures in the host land is defined as a ‘third space’ (Basch, Schiller, Blanc, 2005). Arabic music has influenced Indian music and Indian music has inspired Arabic music too- an example is Nari-Nari- a Bollywood song released in 2001, featured an Egyptian singer and Ya Ali from the film Gangster.

Sociologists like Chanda comment that Indian women, when they travel to newer countries during migration, they are bound by the cultural elements of the home country. They are more connected to the roots sustain cultures, traditions and rituals across borders. This study focuses on understanding how women create a cultural third space of their own, while being the cultural torchbearers in a temporary migration area like UAE. The research was carried out by taking a

survey among 100 women expatriates in the UAE followed by interviews with three women hailing from diverse backgrounds in terms of education, longevity of migration and career. The study helped assess their absorption of the host society's culture and the ways in which they sustain the cultures of the homeland.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Macro theories of migration emphasize on the 'push and pull' factors. Push factors include economic conditions such as unemployment, lower salaries or lower per capita income in home country. Pull factors include better economic opportunities in the host countries (Lee, 1966). Involuntary migration revolves around war and violence. Micro theories of migration are inclined towards individual decisions that drive migration- where the pros and cons of migration are weighed before taking a decision of migrating. Meso-theories speak of voluntary migration modules where the choice of the location where individuals move to is explained.

Trade during the pre-colonial era in India built settlements, that were both temporary and long term. From the 1830s until early 20th century, a large number of Indians were recruited by the British, Dutch and French as indentured labourers (Cohen, 2002). This eventually spread all over the globe and Indian workforce was spread out. There were traders, soldiers, clerks, teachers and people with other occupations to help in the process of colonial governments in other countries

Post-independence, Indians started flying to other countries for work and education. This brought a large number of Indians to move to Gulf countries, especially in the 1970s the years of oil exploration in the Gulf. Indians went for all kinds of work- skilled, unskilled and professional jobs. Gulf migrants now form the largest group of Indian migrants (Chanda & Gupta, 2018). It was more recently that Indians moved to Silicon Valley and grew as technology leaders or entrepreneurs.

In 1984, Philip D. Curtin introduced the term 'diaspora' in the context of South Asian studies (Oonk, 2013). As Indians flew and settled in other countries, they took with them multiple aspects of being and Indian- language, culture, traditions, etc. Although many cultural aspects of India had become a hit in western countries- including Yoga, Ayurveda, Arts, Crafts,

Dances, Food, etc., the magnanimity increased with the development in technology and communications. According to Hussain and Sasikumar (2008), migration is split in three phases- the first was people moving to more high income, developed nations like the USA, UK, Canada and the Gulf. The second phase where semi-skilled and unskilled workers migrate to the Gulf and lastly the third being professionals who move to the America to work in IT industries. Indian emigration to the Gulf can be seen from the high remittances back home.

### ***Migration to the Gulf***

The period between 1973 to 1982, the golden decade for the UAE, when oil was explored and its benefits were assessed. Indians flew into the UAE for all kinds of work- skilled, unskilled, professional and also private sector employment. Each year, from 1992 to 1997, there was an average of four lakh Indians moving to the Gulf. There was a small reduction in the years 1998 to 1999 due to the localization policies, but even during that period only about two to three lakh Indians returned home. After the millennium, the number started going up again. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates alone has the highest share of Indian migrants- about sixty per cent (Winckler, 2019; Kumar 2014).

### ***Culture and Indian Migrants***

From studies by Mearns (1995), Clarke et al (1996), Brah (1996), it is seen that Indians try to create their own identities in a public sphere, they try to assert their Indian identity, form kinship, sustain home culture in the newer lands. Indians living abroad in general wish to keep the Indian culture intact through traditions and values associated with it. These are signified in religious rituals, the films they watch, the language they speak, the dances they dance. They try and replicate their Indian culture in the host country rather than become a part of other cultures. While the members of the diasporic community may have moved away from the homeland, the community still maintains a strong connection with the 'mother culture' and retains bonds through spatial connectors such as kinship networks, food habits, clothes, language, music, and films the community strives to retain a collective memory or myth about their home land (Safran, 1991).

Ngo (2014) describes 'Acculturation' as the process of systematic cultural change which occurs due to direct contact between two cultures as a result of forced relocation, military invasion or migration. The experience of acculturation therefore challenges the cultural structure of both,

the host society and the immigrants. This is a common phenomenon in visa wives, who are mostly forced into relocation because of marriage to a migrant already living in the host society.

Hybridity, also defined as the concept of mixed identity is widely used in the study of culture and the diaspora. Migrants are held between two different cultures and they undergo multiple forces of assimilation in one hand and a feeling of nostalgia of the homeland in the other. A feeling of 'in-betweenness' is created where the identity of the individual is constantly negotiated (Appadurai, 1996) Seeking authenticity of native culture becomes transitioning depending on multiple factors like duration of settlement, geographical borders, education levels and career orientation (Chen, 2010).

### ***Women and Diaspora Culture***

According to Cortina (2012), globally there are 95 female migrants for every 100 male migrants under the age of 20. Chanda (2018) explains that the idea of being Indian has played a major role in constructing the identities of women in the diaspora. Women are called 'custodians of culture' - they are regarded as the watchperson of the Indian core values and instilling them in the household abroad. She is expected to bring a culture of the home within their domestic household and are held responsible for carrying with her the Indian culture of language, clothes, food she cooks and norms and establishing the same within her home in the host society. She is seen to ensure that familial ties back in the home country are kept intact by emotional means by keeping in touch with kinship at home.

Clothing plays a very important role in the way Indian women residing abroad expresses herself. Dressing alternatively, ethnicity and the inability speaking a foreign language like English opposes them to the popular culture. This subjects the women to racism (Agnew, 2008). A vivid example is the burqa ban in France, that does not permit women to wear the burqa in public places. This puts the immigrant women in a crux of being unable to embrace their religious beliefs in a host country. Some women may presume the way they dress as a part of their cultural identity, where some opt to dress differently, marking their own liberation from cultural ties.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Transnational Cultural Identities***

Cultural identity in a globalizing world can never be recognised as static. They are prone to keep changing and adapting to newer realms. The complexities of globalization and migration needs to be applied on understanding national identities and where it hails from. In support of this, Clifford and Hall argue that culture is rather moving and thrives on unvaried roots. Gilroy (1991) claims how one must address diaspora- do not ask ‘Where are you from?’, rather ask, ‘Where are you at?’. Hall (1996) agrees that the changes in the cultural identity in a globalizing world can only be understood as variance of formation of identities and that they cannot be separated from the history of their formation.

From research in anthropology, it is understood that culture and identity act as pointers to identify biological and cultural characteristics that individuals hold, they are factors that differentiate ethnic and racial groups (Clifford, 2000; Rosaldo, 1989). Anthropologists, religious leaders, politicians, medical practitioners and media propagated the ideas of people from different cultures possession different social habits and bodies (Clifford, 2000). This allowed individuals to become attached and loyal to their representations which in turn created a notion of a cult of ethnicity and an idol of diversity (Juan, 1992).

The transnational flow of capital births new communicative practises in the globalised world. The flow of capital from one nation to another across geographical and political borders has also helped understand the concept of hybridity. (Wonders, 2006) Localism and globalism is impacted on both sides by the idea of national identities. Globalization complicates the concept of identity- which eventually brings the need to understand the definition of identity at a localized level. Although on a larger level, the process of migration and globalization creates a world culture, understanding identity at a local level helps us understand the nature if hybridity within the world culture. This enables the redefining of the meaning of ‘belonging’ to a place (Dayal, 1996). For the diaspora, the idea of recreated cultural and symbolic fragments, adds to the value of belongingness. This brings the idea of creating an imagined homeland within the host-land through materializing objects, rituals and traditions. The reclamation of habits, objects, histories, traditions in a newer place rebuilds an imagined home.

People also use art, popular culture, language and other cultural signifiers in this rebuilding of home (Ahmed, et al. 2003).

### ***Hybridity***

Identity among diasporas is not fixed, but is formed in different contexts. In the words of Werbner (2004), identities are situationally- determined. Diasporas hailing from one common region use the same language, traditions and belong to the same nation. They also share and use the same language, traditions and consume the same kind of popular culture- which includes food, films, clothing, etc. Through this, the diaspora is able to reach out to and reconnect with the nostalgia that is associated with their homeland.

Ong, et al., (1994) speaks of Transnationalism, the prefix ‘trans’ stands for moving through space and lines and as if changing the nature of something. Transnationalism emphasises the transition of moving from one space to another. Transnationalism as a theory speaks of interconnectivity and movements across lines and spaces as a global process. Hitchcock (2003), in his studies has illustrated that transnationalism is more of a process of re-thinking culture, going beyond restricting cultural knowledge to its roots. Hitchcock emphasizes that the differences in culture between national bases should be embraced and be opened to newer possibilities.

Although the diaspora strives to maintain their identities intact in the host land, the social political nature there leads to development of newer and sub-identities. Appadurai (1996), in his studies has accentuated a focus on cultural heterogeneities. Hitchcock, Jehlen and Appadurai state that new media, migration, communication and interaction pave way for creation of newer cultural forms- hybrid cultural identities rather than homogenization of culture in the age of globalization. Across borders, some cultural aspects remain absorbed and some stand out on its own, signifying a hybridity of cultures rather than fusion of culture. Bhabha (1994) in his studies has also identified the concept of ‘third spaces’ which acts as an ambivalent and liminal space where cultures interplay. Bakhtin (1984) defines hybridity as a form of cultural difference itself. The third space hence formed on one culture meeting the other, allows participants to speak their own languages, study their own histories, use their own cultures but also allows participants to construct newer cultural roots and identities.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research focuses on how women belonging to the Indian Diaspora who have migrated from India to the UAE create new cultural identities. Although migrant women are considered to be the keepers of the Indian culture in a foreign land, the research aims to discover the existence of a 'third space' where they embrace the culture of the host land as well as staying true to the roots of their homeland.

- How is the feeling of 'liminal' reflected in culture of Indian women expats in UAE?
- Are women the cultural custodians in migrant life?
- How is the third culture effective in women, when they are custodians of culture?

## METHODOLOGY

The researcher took survey from over a hundred Indian women migrants in the UAE from various backgrounds from Indian women who resided in the seven emirates of UAE- Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Al Ain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah. The survey was published online for over 15 days- from 14th May 2019 to 29th May 2019 and hundred women took the survey. The survey asked questions to understand the exposure of women migrants to popular culture in the UAE- the Arabic food, Arabic music and clothing. The research also questioned their inclination towards Indian cultural signifiers like the 'Mangal Sutra', anklets, bangles, etc. Post the survey, the researcher carried out telephonic interviews and personal interviews with three Indian women residing in UAE. This helped in providing a lived narrative understanding of migrant culture of Indian women.



## FINDINGS

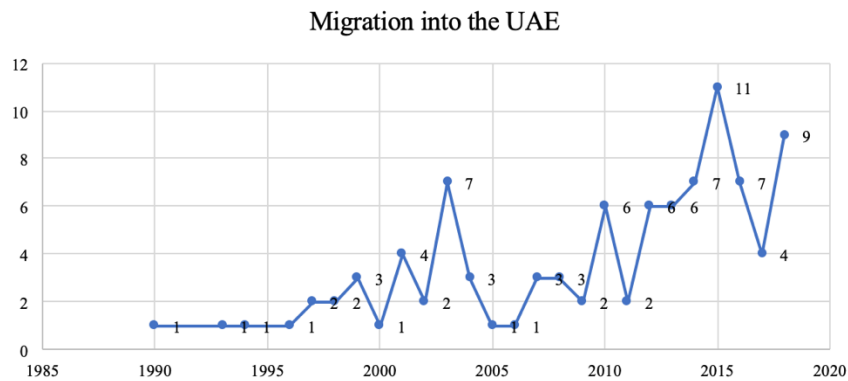


Fig 1. Migration to UAE

It is understood from Fig 1. that in the year 2015 a lot of the participants migrated to the UAE. Followed by the year 2002, the year when 7 per cent of the participants moved in to UAE. 72 per cent of the participants moved to UAE because of their marriage or husband’s job. Only 23 per cent of the participants moved to the UAE because of their own job and about 5 per cent of the participants moved for reasons like studies, travel, etc.

### Did you learn any Indian cultural art when you were living in India?

100 responses

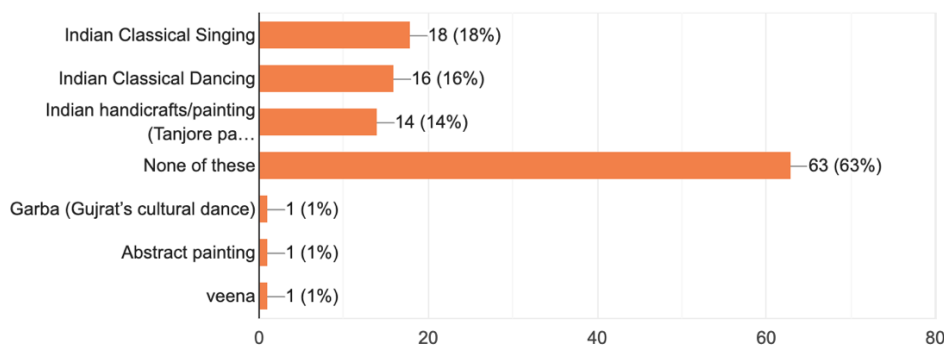


Fig 2. Knowledge of Indian cultural arts

Fig. 2., explains if the participants learned any kind of Indian cultural art- when they were residing in India. Although majority of them are not trained in any art, 18 per cent of the

participants have learned classical singing, 17 per cent – Indian classical dancing and 14 per cent of the participants have learned a style of Indian handicraft or painting.

#### How well do you know Arabic?

100 responses

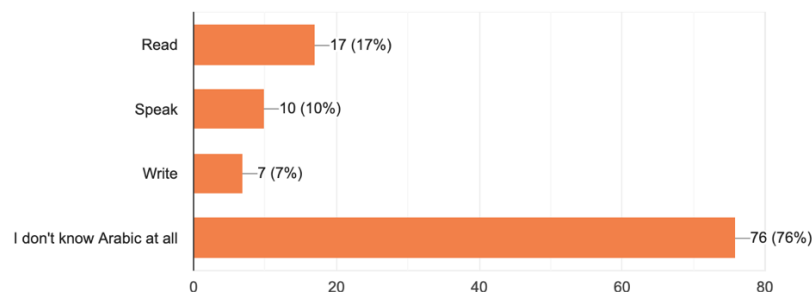


Fig 3. Knowledge of the Arabic Language

Although majority of the participants do not know Arabic at all, about 17 per cent have learned to read Arabic, 10 per cent to speak and 7 per cent to write. Majority of the participants have tried Arabic food in UAE (87 per cent) as illustrated in Fig 3. And 42 per cent of the participants have also tried cooking Arabic food at home. 53 participants enjoy and love Arabic music- an important signifier in the adaptation of popular culture in the host country. It should also be noted that 32 per cent have not even listened to Arabic music. Majority of the participants (80 per cent) of them have not even watched anything in Arabic. About 18 per cent have watched Arabic TV shows, 5 per cent have watched Arabic films.

Fig 4., indicates that majority of the participants wear saree occasionally. 42 participants wear a sign of marriage- the Mangal Sutra, Toe ring, on an everyday basis. Many participants are seen to embrace the Indian cultural signifiers like anklets, bangles, salwar kameez (attire) on an everyday basis. 92 participants cook Indian food at home usually. None of them cook Arabic food on an everyday basis at home. Some try Chinese/ Thai cuisine and some, continental.

42 per cent of the participants enjoy watching Indian films once a month. 31 per cent of the participants watch a film every weekend and 26 per cent watch Indian films rarely. Only one of the participants never watches Indian films in the UAE.

Which of these do you wear on an everyday basis?

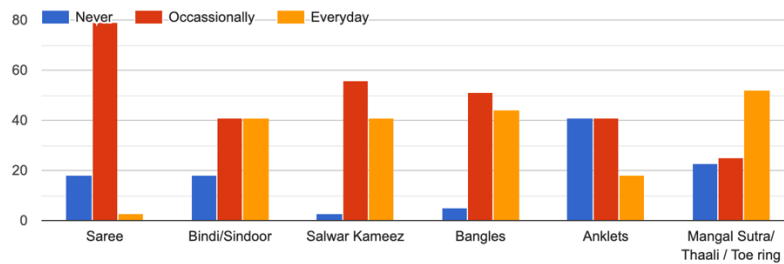


Fig 4. Everyday Indian cultural signifiers

To understand if the participants celebrate Indian festivals and how they do so, a question was posed in the survey. It is understood that 46 participants celebrate events in a simple manner, at home. 38 per cent celebrate with other family and 14 per cent go to social events and gatherings to celebrate Indian festivals. Only one of the participants has said they do not celebrate any Indian festivals in the UAE.

62 per cent of the participants have trained their children in Indian classical art forms. It is understood from the adjacent graph that from the 62 participants, 30 children are trained in Indian arts and crafts, 18 children in Indian classical music and 12 in Indian classical dance.

How do you celebrate Indian Festivals like regional new year Diwali, Christmas, Eid in the UAE?

100 responses

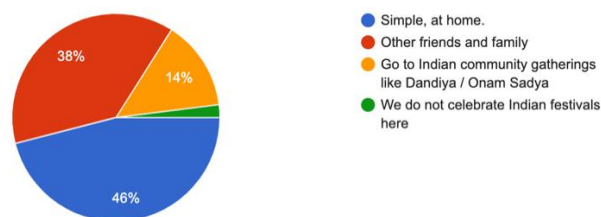


Fig 5. Celebration of Indian Festivals

41 participants fly to Indian once a year and 59 per cent of the participants fly twice a year. There is no one who doesn't go back home in a year. It is understood that the participants like to bring back some element of the Indian culture back to the UAE. The majority being food items (84 per cent), clothing (74 per cent), crafts, home décor and religious things at 64 per

cent and Indian literature at 22 per cent. It is clear that everyone brings back something of an Indian cultural significance on their return (Fig 6).

### What are the very 'Indian' things you bring back from India?

100 responses

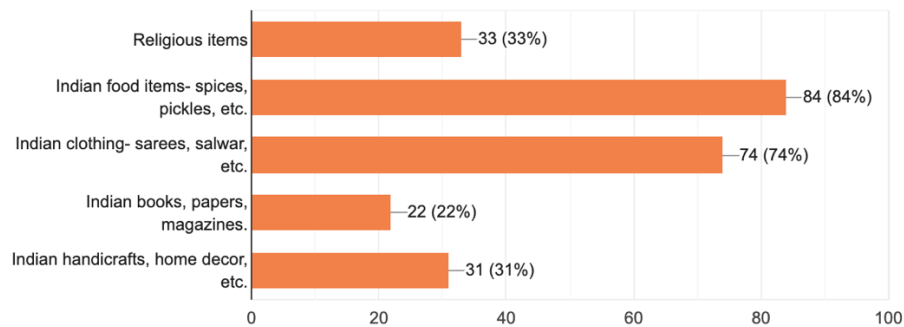


Fig 6. What the participants carry back from India

### *Interview 1*

Seetha (name changed on request), a homemaker based in Abu Dhabi, aged 50, from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Seetha was seen to be wearing a saree in all the photos around her home, this invoked a curiosity to which Seetha answered:

I love wearing the saree and I love the attention I receive when people from other countries randomly compliment my saree! I have always donned the saree with great pride especially after moving to Abu Dhabi as I feel it makes me feel at home (India).

She had moved to the UAE in the year 2001, along with her husband, because of a better job opportunity in Abu Dhabi. They visit India twice every year- during the summer break followed by a brief visit during the winter break. One of her children is doing their college degree in Chennai, India and the younger child is studying secondary school in a British curriculum school in Abu Dhabi. On being questioned why the family had chosen to send the elder child to study in India.

Education is better and cheaper at home. My family and I will move back to India once the younger child joins college, so it makes the shift easier for us. I chose to send her back to Chennai as there are our relatives who can take care of her well.

She seemed to have had very mixed emotions on arrival in Dubai. It was during a time when there were no flights flying from Chennai to Abu Dhabi but one had to take connecting flights via Qatar to reach Dubai, she recollects. She arrived with her six-year-old elder child, to be received by her husband. Although Seetha was stunned by the magnificent buildings that surrounded her on her way to her new home, she started missing home immediately on arrival. She took about three to four months to come to an acceptance of her newer home and before she ventured out alone. However, she quickly adapted to a rote routine of waking up, making breakfast, sending off husband and child to school followed by a morning of TV, sleep and again begin making lunch. She slowly started speaking to neighbours who were Indians and discovered regional cultural circles prevalent in Abu Dhabi at that time including associations like India Social Center and Tamil Ladies Circle. As Seetha's older child was already training in Bharathanyam and Indian Carnatic music, she got actively involved in cultural activities organized by these circles. She started building friendships and eventually getting her husband involved in these cultural activities as well.

After two years of landing in Abu Dhabi, she became pregnant with her second child, after which three years fast forwarded in taking care of the baby. It was after the second child began going to school, that Seetha came to know about someone who was teaching arts and crafts in the same locality. A woman of hailing from Chennai, living in Abu Dhabi was teaching Indian art and handicrafts to children and housewives from her home and joined her classes to discover her new interest towards painting. She undertook training using techniques like Kerala Mural art and Tanjore art. She began exploring her interest further and received professional training in Tanjore art when she visited India during one of their family summer holidays. She now professionally paints and retails her artwork using online platforms.

Seetha only makes Indian food at home with spices that she carries from home on her visit to India. She explains that there is a temple located in the Dubai Emirate to which they travel twice a year whenever they find time. The temple is located in a heritage building by the harbour and is huge.

The temple houses a small pathway that is more like a commercial street where Indian Shops are located. One can find anything and everything from home within this street. I miss the temples in Dina. I try my best to recreate some rituals at home, or with other

women from my friend's circle. UAE doesn't allow us to worship Hindu gods using an idol- so we stick to doing Pooja to images.

Seetha has tried and she loves Arabic food. Although, she says that she might not want to eat Arabic cuisine every day, she doesn't shy away from trying it once a month. She has visited places of religious and cultural significance of UAE and also flaunted an image of her wearing the Burka on her visit to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque.

When I first moved to the UAE, I used to feel extremely lonely after sending the husband and children on their way in the mornings. We did not really have that many Tamil or Hindi channels in the television back then, I used to entertain myself by watching Arabic music videos or Arabic Soap Operas on TV! It however did not help me in learning Arabic, the maximum I learned is 'Maafi Mushkil', 'Kaifa Halek' and 'Qaf'!

Seetha consumes cultural figments of UAE and India both together. She does agree with the question of being a custodian of Indian culture in her host country. She seems to think of herself as the person responsible for sustaining home culture in the form of food, religion and clothing and carrying it forward to her children. Women like Seetha play a major role in holding on to the home culture in the migrant land. Seetha strongly believes she needs to keep the Indian authenticity alive in their everyday lives so as to make the transition of moving back to India more comfortable for herself and the whole family.

### ***Interview 2***

This interview was taken with a 35-year-old Indian woman Yoga instructor based in UAE. She has been a resident of Dubai for over 10 years and is the mother to a six-year-old boy, who studies in an Indian School in Dubai. She has always been a yoga instructor since she finished her graduation in India. She had moved to the UAE on marrying an Indian employee in the UAE. She began teaching yoga immediately on moving to the UAE, just within a few months. Preethi (name changed on request) hails from Mumbai, India. She actively began involving herself in cultural activities upon her husband's introduction to Indian cultural circles in Dubai.

Pratap (Name Changed), my husband was already a very social person who was a member of the Dubai Indian Association. He was a key member and was involved in all of the organization's cultural activities. I attended all the events with him, slowly creating and expanding my client base in Dubai.

Preethi, on being questioned as to what she misses the most about home, she claims to be her parents. Apart from Yoga, Preethi does not affiliate herself or her son to any other Indian cultural art form, simply because she doesn't find the necessity. Her son studies in an Indian School and she is glad he is intact with the Indian culture in another country. However, she agrees that she would not have worried much even if it was the other way. Preethi cooks both Indian and dishes adapted from other cuisines like Arabic and Asian.

I am not at all a religious person. I do have a small shelf installed in my home that has about three photos of Indian Hindu gods and a lamp- this is only to keep my mother in law happy as she visits us once a while! She brings with her all the photos, lamps and everything else.

Preethi visits India once a year during the summer break - July and August with her family. During her visit, she brings from home, Indian foodstuff and clothing which she mostly wears to Indian gatherings. Preethi enjoys Arabic cuisine and consumes some kind of Arabic Dish at least once a week. She has tried the Burka only during her visit to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. She enjoys Arabic music as much as she enjoys English Music, she reads about Arabic Pop culture once a while. Although she does not know how to speak in Arabic, she claims to have learned to read Arabic on her own and that she can read sign boards, newspaper or magazine headings and can understand tid bits of the language.s

### ***Interview 3***

Nalini, a dental doctor and a mother of two children, moved to the UAE after marrying a resident of UAE. She has been employed as a doctor in a dental clinic for over 15 years now. Both her children, one 12 years old and the other, 10 years old- are currently training in Indian Classical Carnatic Singing from an Indian teacher. Nalini's elder daughter learns Odissi, an Indian classical dance form. Nalini visits India once a year during the summer break along with her family.

It constantly lingers in my mind that we are not permanent residents here in the UAE as they do not provide citizenships or status of permanent residency. We plan to go back to India to settle once we retire. But It doesn't always stop me or my family from trying out new things, we live in the moment and embrace all cultures in the way they come. I have so many Arabic friends who are also my clients, we love the UAE as much as we love India!

Nalini urges her children to pursue their higher education, after their schooling, in India. She makes sure their children are able to read, write and speak fluently in their mother tongue and has even put them in Tamil classes—which are free and are conducted weekly in different parts of Abu Dhabi. Nalini urges her children to attend a lot of Indian cultural events to perform and watch others perform. Nalini makes it a point to wear a saree to work once a week. She is active in Indian cultural circles and also is a member in the Indian Social Center in Abu Dhabi. She cooks Although Nalini has Arabic friends, she has listened to Arabic music when in public places but has never been curious to actually put in effort to listen to it. She has neither watched Arabic TV shows or films. Nalini has been consuming the minimal Arabic culture she has been exposed to, she does however feel responsible in imparting elements of Indian culture within her household.

## **DISCUSSION**

The majority of the women have moved into the UAE because of marriage or spouse's job requirements. Many were curious and inquisitive about the new land, some nervous and fearful and some felt a sense of freedom. The duration of residence in the UAE matters in seeking authenticity- the longer their residence in UAE, more the nostalgia towards homeland; shorter the residence, lesser their nostalgia. The earlier they moved to UAE, have made sure to train their children in some form of Indian cultural art form. Some women have learned to read, write or speak Arabic indicating the adaptation to a local language. Almost all of the participants know to speak their mother tongue, and seven of them, have also learned to speak Arabic. Although most of the participants only cook Indian cuisine at home, the majority of them have tried Arabic cuisine at home or elsewhere. It is seen that participants are inclined towards making Indian food at home, but are open to cooking Arabic cuisine too. It is



understood that the participants have neither shifted completely to an Arabic cuisine, nor have they abstained from trying Arabic food.

When trying to understand the adaptation of Arabic media in Indian women migrant's lives, over half of the women love and enjoy Arabic music. Very few of them, 23 per cent of the participants have watched either Arabic TV shows or Arabic films. At the same time, 99 per cent of the participants watch Indian films in the UAE. The numbers signify a welcoming of the Arabic pop culture, but at the same time, Indian pop culture is wholly embraced.

Apart from one participant, all of the participants celebrate Indian festivals in UAE. It is understood that many prefer to celebrate the festivals simply within their homes (46 per cent), over half of them prefer celebrating festivals with friends and family or in social gatherings in Indian Community Centres. All the participants fly back home during breaks and holidays. When they return back, they bring back some object of Indian cultural significance with them. The idea of nostalgia and longing of the homeland is exhibited here through the bringing back of material objects from home. Food items like spices, pickles are the fragments of Indian culture that the majority bring back. Attire constitutes about 74 per cent, followed by handicrafts, decor and literature and also items of religious significance.

From the interviews, it is understood that Seetha, who came to UAE much earlier than Preethi seems to be associated with the home culture more than Preethi. This is evident in her bringing back more elements of Indian culture on her visit home, she travels home more and has trained herself and her children in Indian cultural art forms. This provides insight that the younger generation might be more adaptive towards the host culture and open to adapting newer cultural experiences and expressions. On the other hand, Nalini seems to carry forward Indian cultural aspects in her and her children's everyday lives showcasing her longing for home. The cultural identity is directly in accordance with the permanency of migratory status. The existence of third space, a liminal cultural space depends on the feeling of being 'home away from home'. If there is an inherent feeling of returning back home at any given point, especially due to external factors, like layoffs, political issues in host land, and so on, the feeling of nostalgia seems stronger.

## CONCLUSION

Migration of the participants to UAE falls under voluntary migration- majority of the women seem to have moved to UAE because they married someone who is residing in the UAE or moved together with the spouse for reaping economic benefits. From the research, it is understood that the notion of cultural identity is transient in the case of emigrant Indian women in the UAE. The paper assessed the meaning of cultural identity at a local level, thus defining it as mobile, transitory and constantly in motion, in an ephemeral space. In depth interview with three different women residents in the UAE shed light on a lived narrative of assuming the third culture while remaining torch bearers of the home culture. A third space where the culture of home and host land is constantly negotiated. Some have learned to communicate in Arabic- either reading, writing or speaking and some have even tried Arabic Food. Women who moved to UAE from before 2006 have all tried Arabic food, but at the same time bring back Indian food ingredients with them whenever they visit home. The longer their residence in the UAE does not necessarily mean they have embraced the Arabic cuisine in their everyday lives, they still prefer cooking Indian cuisine at home, and bring back Indian foodstuff and ingredients from India. However, longer the residence in the host land, creates even stronger cultural ties towards homeland, infused with nostalgia and seeking of authenticity in the Indian culture for the women. From one of the interviews, it is understood that since the migrants who have moved to the UAE do not receive permanent resident status in the country, their longing for home and the need to remain in touch with the home country and the culture is very important to sustain in the host land. This sheds light on how migrants keep in touch with host culture in countries where migrants may receive permanent residency. Indian women in UAE embrace the culture of the host land by consuming its music, as well as watching Indian films in the screens in UAE. Cultural diffusion is seen prominently in the consumption of popular culture like music, language and food. They are seen to bring back fragments of Indian culture in the form of food stuff, attire, religious items, home décor to help them with reconstruction of home in the host land. Women migrants also wear Indian cultural signifiers like the saree, salwar kameez, mangal sutra, anklets and bangles and celebrate Indian festivals at home, with friends and family or even in social gatherings in India Centres or Indian Social Centres, thus seeking authenticity of 'home' in a foreign land. About 3 per cent of the women have learned Indian art forms like Tanjore Painting or Kerala Mural art after moving to the UAE which

explains the concept of longing for and sense of nostalgia towards homeland. Majority of the women train their children in some form of Indian arts in UAE. This falls in line with the theory proposed by Chanda (2018) that Indian women act as keepers of the Indian culture in the location they migrated to. Contrastingly, Preethi, one of the interviewees, is newer to UAE but does not seem very keen in training her child or herself in any Indian cultural art form. However, she still participates in Indian cultural events. Both Seetha and Preethi enjoy Arabic food, however, the latter came to the UAE much recently than the former, seems to enjoy the Arabic cultural elements like the food, language and Arabic pop culture more. This brings us back to the point where the recent their move to the UAE, the more they are open to adapting to the host culture. The idea of duration of longer stay exposes them to making the adaptation easier, however, when the participant or the participant's spouse is nearing retirement or the time to move back to India on visa expiration or other factors, their longing and cultural attachment is stronger. The paper suggests a third space where the culture of host and home is consumed in everyday lives and they create a cultural identity of itself. They do not fall within the culture of India nor within the culture of UAE. In the case of Indian expatriates in UAE, they do not consume all the cultural components of the host land in moving to UAE but they do choose some elements like music and food- also not letting go of popular culture from home like Indian films. They reconstruct the idea of home, keeping in touch with the nostalgia that arises with moving to a new country by engaging in Indian cultural activities. This cultural identity is dichotomous in nature and it is constantly in transition fitting into the lives and choices of migrant women in UAE.

## **FUTURE STUDIES**

A comparative study between the cultural identities and how they up-keep Indian culture in the host society between men and women migrants might provide further insight into this concept of how women are the cultural torch bearers. Another study where women migrants hoping for permanent residency in the migrant land express cultural aspects. A more specific approach to the same topic, how women the UAE adapted to the host culture or the psychological impacts of moving to a newer land and adopting to the third cultural space might help in further in depth understanding. Limited study is available on women who have flown to other nations as wives.

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