

Foodways and Culinary Capital in the Diaspora: Indian Women Expatriates in South Africa

Gerelene JAGGANATH

University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

ABSTRACT

As people and families migrate, so too do their gastronomies (cooking, preparing, dining and eating styles of a particular place) travel with them across space and time, modifying according to social and environmental circumstances. As trans-migrant communities spread across the globe, foods gain significance in the diaspora as much for their novelty as for their nostalgia and ties to the homeland. This study is about the negotiation of practices and beliefs around food preference and consumption among a group of Indian expatriate families in two major cities in South Africa. It specifically examines the food preparation, consumption choices and culinary capital of a group of Indian women expatriates residing in Durban and Johannesburg, South Africa.

Keywords: *transnational, foodways, diaspora, culinary capital, expatriates.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Food is one of the most significant cultural markers of identity in contemporary societies and provides a channel through which to understand social relations, family and kinship, class and consumption, gender ideology and cultural symbolism. Anthropological food discourse brings to our attention that foodways are simultaneously local and global, foregrounding changes in the local dynamics of production, consumption, adaptation, identity construction, and post-modern consumerism (Cheung and Chee-Beng, 2007). The use of the terms ‘foodways’ and ‘foodscapes’ in this study draws on the following explanations. *Foodways* refers to the culinary practices of a region or culture, historical and popular. It includes discussions of procurement, preparation, and consumption of food (see Dhoklia, 7 May 2007). *Foodscapes* refers to the places and spaces where you acquire food, prepare food, talk about food, or generally gather some sort of meaning from food. This is your foodscape. While the concept is widely used to refer to urban food environments, sociologists have extended the concept to include the institutional arrangements, cultural spaces, and discourses that mediate our relationship with our food (see MacKendrick, 22 December 2014). Within the context of migration, Pollock (2009) aptly states that tracing transnational influences through foodscapes enables us to highlight cultural continuities and innovations, choices that communities make to enhance

their identity. The study of food and foodways is pertinent to understanding modern history and social change, prompting an examination of changing social taste and cultural values. Transnational communities bring with them a rich cultural background, which, while representing the visible features of their identity, also provides them with the means for their integration and acceptance into the new society. The study focuses on a group of Indian women expatriates living in South Africa. The participants comprised 2 sub-groups of Indian expatriate women. The larger group consisted of the wives of non-resident Indians (NRIs), that is, 'dependents' of highly skilled husbands (with transnational, semi-permanent migration status), and the smaller group comprised Indian women who are living in South Africa (recent emigrants), through marriage to South African Indian husbands. It explores the women's gendered roles in providing, preparing and presenting food to their families, and the balance they maintain in imparting family and cultural values, while adjusting to life and foodways in South Africa. Indian women in general, are predominantly responsible for food work (accessing and buying ingredients and food items, preparing and cooking food) and family meals represent a significant part of household activity. In this paper, the meanings the women impart to their families' food choices are explored in relation to their conceptualizations of self.

The paper comprises two parts. Part one is a consideration of the background and research methodology, while part two constitutes the core content with the presentation and analysis of data using case studies, followed by the conclusion.

2. PART ONE: BACKGROUND

Feminist scholarship's focus on the connections between gendered divisions of labour in the home and in the labour market, and distinctions between the private and public realms prove useful in understanding women's relationship to food. Women's work with food spans the formal economy, informal economy, and household economy (Allen and Sachs, 2007). Such discourse can prove limiting in specific multi-sited and ethnic contexts where for instance, food plays a defining role in engaging local and national culture and what people eat reflects numerous factors including societal, spiritual, artistic, psychological, political, economic and other conditions. It becomes necessary "to probe the creative response of both men and women as they confront and adapt prior normative assumptions about gender, conjugal roles, family and parenthood to their new circumstances" (Johnson and Werbner, 2010:27). This study moves away from the gamut of sociological discourse and debates on women's oppression and victimization, and focuses rather on the ability of Indian wives in coping and adapting while preserving, reinventing and transcending the challenges within a multi-sited trajectory. In transnational migration, Shobita Jain (2009:17) for instance, refers to the agency of Indian women as "trans-creation" wherein "the ever-recurring process of spatial construction of wide

ranging social relations [. . .] give meaning to the new without losing the old”. Within the diaspora, the household and the kitchen becomes a creative space within the foodscape that shapes women’s “simultaneity” (Ong, 2006), and foodwork becomes a form of activism whereby women negotiate change and identity.

People of Indian origin (PIO’s) arrived in South Africa in 1860 as indentured labourers who worked on the sugar plantations of the present day province of KwaZulu Natal (KZN). Such immigration (of unskilled labour and passenger Indians, also referred to as the Old Indian diaspora) ended in 1914. Today, South African Indians are fourth, fifth and sixth generation descendants of those original indentured labourers and later passenger or ‘free’ Indians (mainly traders) who made South Africa their home. Among the cities of the world, Durban in KwaZulu Natal is rated as having the highest concentration of overseas Indians (see Mukherji, 23 July 2011). In 1994 with the advent of a democratic constitution, immigration policy restrictions imposed by the apartheid regime were scrapped. People from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh arrived in South Africa as new immigrants (see www.sahistory.org.za/indian-south-africans). The numbers and exact locations of non-resident Indians (NRIs) in the country has not been documented. Anecdotal evidence from group discussions with NRI community leaders during fieldwork for this study, suggests that approximately 30 000 Indian expatriates live in the KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng provinces. Scholarly articles on NRIs in post-apartheid South Africa are scarce and statistical evidence on their exact numbers and movement in the country are uncertain. Information on Indian women in this context is even more difficult to access. For the purposes of this paper, the terms ‘NRI’ and ‘Indian expatriate’ are used interchangeably as they both refer to Indian nationals who are living and/or working outside of India for varying periods of time. While ‘expatriate’ generally connotes a lengthier period of time abroad, there are NRIs who are both expatriates as well as NRIs, based not only on the number of years they have lived outside of India but for whom certain taxation rules apply. The participants often referred to themselves and each other as NRIs or ‘expats’.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork for this study emanates from on-going research on women in the Indian diaspora since early 2015. Ethnographic data based on interviews and participant observation informed the study and was supplemented with group discussions, informal conversations, email questionnaires, socialising at meetings and events, dining with families and guests, as well as an examination of websites, blogs and news articles. The time spent with non-resident Indian (NRI) families and interactions within their familial networks enabled some insight into their immediate surroundings which reflect their identity as Indian

nationals in South Africa. These observations and experiences have culminated in an enduring interest in varied aspects of transnational migration and Indian women. The sample of ten Indian women, eight NRI wives of highly skilled Indian men, and two Indian nationals married to South African Indian (business) men, ranged in ages 26 to 55 years. To gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and activities of those involved, the narratives of the women are presented as case studies. Case studies articulate a wealth of detail on the context, the processes and the experiences of participants.

The common thread in this small sample of women was that they were all Hindu and possessed tertiary level education. Beyond this, they came from diverse sending regions in India (including Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Rajasthan and Maharashtra), different caste backgrounds and varying transnational experiences. The women also presented with different migration backgrounds. Some were living abroad for the first time, while others had lived in several destinations (including Singapore, Dubai and Kenya) before coming to South Africa. Purposive sampling of the key informants from the researcher's own social network was inevitable given the constraints of accessing Indian expatriates. A high level of rapport was necessary in order to engage in daily activities such as cooking, dining and socialising. The researcher's association and involvement with NRI community leaders from diaspora-based organizations such as Global Organization for People of Indian Origin (Gopio) and Vihangam Yoga (South Africa), a spiritual group, facilitated networking with NRI women in particular, who became part of the sample. The study explores the thoughts, ideas and experiences of a group of Indian women expatriates who have been residing in South Africa for varied durations of time, some from as short a time as 5 months and others who have lived in South Africa for almost 10 years. Most of the women were 'dependents' on their husband's work permits and therefore unable to seek gainful employment in South Africa. It was these circumstances that prompted the study as the women spent much of their time within foodscapes that revolved around the household and kitchen. The women in the sample currently reside in two major South African cities, namely Durban and Johannesburg. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities.

4. PART TWO: THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITION

The second part of the paper relates to the challenges and food experiences the women encountered in migrating to South Africa and refers to the following open-ended questions asked during interviews and informal discussions:

- 1) What experience in moving to South Africa did you find most challenging?
- 2) Are you (and your family) vegetarian or non-vegetarian? Has this changed while living in the diaspora?
- 3) What does ‘the kitchen’ mean to you as an Indian woman living in South Africa?

The dominant themes arising from these questions broadly relate to the women’s experiences with food and family since moving to South Africa, namely:

- 1) Their transition from living in an extended or joint family (in India) to a nuclear family household (in South Africa);
- 2) Their vegetarian versus non-vegetarian food choices;
- 3) Their agency in using the kitchen as a creative space to enhance the lives of their family while empowering themselves as individuals.

The case studies presented for each theme contextualize the women’s experiences against the transition they make between two worlds (in India, the “homeland” and South Africa, the “host land”). The themes presented below, illustrate the changes in household structure; negotiating vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism; and drawing on culinary capital in the kitchen as a creative space. The case studies provide a vignette on each theme, and excerpts from interviews and discussions during fieldwork add to the women’s narratives.

5. HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES

One of the most obvious transitions in household arrangements experienced by the expatriate women was that of moving from an extended or joint family household (in India) to a nuclear family setup in the diaspora. This was the case for nine of the ten women in the sample. Only one woman in the sample had moved from an extended family in India to an extended family in South Africa. This shift in household arrangement had certain implications for the women, particularly their adjustment to a lacking support system and kin network in the new country. In the diaspora, in this instance, South Africa, the sample of women typified two nuclear family arrangements, namely, those with children and those without children. In the former, the responsibilities of being wife and mother as well as the minutiae of daily life such as cooking, cleaning, parenting and transporting children to school became a full-time career. Those women without children in their household, were older women who had adult children living or studying in other parts of the world. While their immediate responsibilities as wives included cooking, cleaning, socialising and assisting their husbands, their interactions with their children were less constraining. It was predominantly among the younger women with children, for whom the

preparing, cooking and consuming of 'home cooked' food became a defining activity and responsibility. Whilst some of them had worked as professionals in India, being 'dependents' of their spouses in South Africa, meant they could not seek employment. In India, they generally had the support of the extended family and domestic helpers in the form of maids, gardeners and sometimes cooks and drivers. The following news article excerpt illustrates this trend:

India, like Britain and America until a century ago, has an established culture of live-in servants. Professional urban families often have a "maid", usually a young migrant woman, who does everything from dusting to child care. Wealthier homes have an entourage stretching from sweeper to housekeeper. [. . .] A glut of unskilled workers has long provided cheap labour. ("Can't get help: Cheap household labour is no longer in abundant supply", 22 December 2012)

The women remarked that there was variation in the extended families of their parental and marital households, based on class and geography. For instance, two women expressed that some families could not afford a multitude of servants, nor did they necessarily perform all household tasks. This was affirmed by one participant who commented: "Our servant only came for cleaning and nothing more. We did not have a gardener or driver because we lived in the city. The women in the house did all the cooking." (Interview with Jyothi, 10 May 2016). Another interviewee indicated: "My mother-in-law only allowed her [maid] to clean the house and make chapatis...to save time." (Interview with Renu, 16 May 2016).

Further comments from the sample indicated that the extended family, while preserving household traditions across generations with defined gendered roles and spaces, was also a fluid entity that allowed the working woman a degree of reprieve from household duties such as cooking and childcare. Working women had the support of extended kin members to cook, feed, transport and care for children in the absence of both working parents. Most women shared household responsibilities such as accessing food items and cooking, as well as preparing speciality food items for religious rituals and fasting, with their mothers-in-law and other women (such as sisters-in-law and daughters) in the household. The women were mostly of the opinion that such responsibilities did not oppress them but rather elevated their agency and autonomy whilst drawing the family together. Similarly, Avakian (2005:261) writes how women in the diasporic context have contradictory relationships to foodwork and may use it to 'transgress patriarchy'. She refers to cooking among Armenian women who "assert that their mothers and grandmothers created authority and control in their kitchens, which often became a space where they bonded with other women".

Comments from the women made during discussions provided some insight into the extended family dynamics the women left behind when they migrated to foreign destinations. For instance, one participant related how women tried to cater for all members of the household, mentioning that "in India we cook the

family favourites...I learnt from my mother-in-law how to cook... food which the husband will like and we also cook what our children will like...it's a mix." (Interview with Manu, 21 January 2016).

Another woman also elaborated how the kitchen was a hub of activity throughout the day, remarking that "cooking is shared...breakfast and lunch is prepared by my mother-in-law and supper is prepared by the daughters-in-law...everything happens in the same kitchen." (Interview with Shilpa, 18 May 2016). Similarly another participant stated: "My father-in-law or the driver collects the children from school and my mother-in-law welcomes the children home after school and prepares their lunch...I cook supper." (Interview with Anitha, 17 May 2016).

Further to these comments, another participant added how women congregate during festivities, saying "cooking for religious festivals and fasting is done by women... sometimes my mother will join ...sometimes we buy from ladies nearby who specialise in making these things (sweetmeats and savoury snacks)... it's just as good and made the same way we prepare it." (Interview with Latha, 12 May 2016).

On a very different note, one of the women indicated how technology was beginning to assist the working woman with her cooking responsibilities, claiming that "many working women order online, everything is cleaned, cut, packed and delivered...it is not so easy here (in South Africa), everything is a distance away if you are living in the suburbs." (Interview with Preeti, 13 May 2016)

In South Africa, there were no kin support structures and the women adopted all household and childcare responsibilities themselves. Among the ten women, four women had local African domestic helpers who were employed specifically for cleaning, one day a week. The shift from being professional working women in India to 'housewives' in South Africa was challenging. Those women with young children seemed to readily accept their responsibilities. Some viewed their newfound domestic roles as a transitory phase in their migration trajectory, while the older women tended to view their transnational status as a 'semi-retirement' from the working world, occupying themselves by assisting their spouses and providing support to adult children whenever possible. Another challenge facing the women on arriving in South Africa, was learning to drive a car. Manu for instance, elaborated how her 'expat' family helped her learn how to drive and that it was a daunting experience: "I was very afraid to drive in a new country and it took me a long time to learn...my husband travels a lot in Africa and he didn't have too much time to teach me." (Interview with Manu, 21 May 2016). Another participant had a similar experience but also shared that driving had brought her more independence and better food choices, saying: "I can drive everywhere now and I am not so lonely...I drive to the markets for fresh vegetable instead of buying frozen food and half-ripe fruit on the shelf which is not healthy." (Interview with Jyothi, 10 May 2016)

Driving their children to school provided independence and self-sufficiency while alleviating the loneliness the women experienced when confined to the household in a new country. Further to this, driving also contributed positively to finding alternate food sources which enhanced their food work (accessing, preparing and cooking food). In this way, they began expanding their foodscapes and the boundaries around which eating and cooking occurred. For instance, they were able to visit grocery stores, speciality stores and markets (outside the neighbourhood) as well as socialise with friends and fellow expatriates at coffee shops, fast food chains and cultural events. The women enjoyed showcasing regional cuisine at family and other social gatherings as a way of displaying their cooking talents. It was the women's way of preserving traditional recipes and asserting their regional and caste identity. While the younger women in the sample did not necessarily have the cooking skills and experience of the older women, they learned from each other and also referred to a multitude of Indian culinary websites and a growing number of Indian food blogs on the internet. The following news article entitled 'NRI bloggers write up a storm to revive Indian traditional food' (Rahman, 17 August 2015) indicates this emerging trend:

[A] growing tribe of women are bringing about a delicious revival of a fast disappearing menu of traditional Indian food. Armed with the infinite power of the internet, these women are using their blogs to inspire others of their kind to bring back the charm and goodness of authentic Indian cuisine that is losing the battle to either fast food or other cuisine...with video recipes to explain the entire process of cooking clearly, step by step photographs and readily available feedback to doubts and queries, the bloggers are cooking up a literal storm in the virtual world that aim to reach the kitchens and bring back the good old traditional twist on the dinner plate for millions of Indians, particularly young professionals and students, away from home and hearth.

During interviews as well as in casual conversation, the women emphasised the importance of the use of fresh ingredients (particularly vegetables) in their diet and 'home-cooked', 'freshly made' meals. They claimed it was healthier and more authentic to the Indian style of cooking, as opposed to frozen, tinned and preserved food, which was minimised or avoided. On spending more time shopping together, socialising more frequently at each other's homes, school events and cultural gatherings, the women shared information in two key ways, namely, where to access the best ingredients and food items most closely resembling the quality they used in India and what ingredients to use as substitutes for ingredients not available in South Africa. The women maintained that in the diaspora, other Indian expatriate families and friendships with local women (South African Indians) became 'second families' or fictive extended kin. It was these newfound networks that eased the transition in settlement and sustained the migrants, who through familiarity and a shared cultural capital

were able to cope and assimilate in a foreign country. Among the close friendships forged with other expatriate Indian women, shared knowledge and experiences within the diaspora provided the support, guidance and nostalgia of the homeland with its rich traditions, values and ultimately, food skills.

6. VEGETARIANS AND NON-VEGETARIANS

The preservation of identity in the diaspora includes the adoption of a wide range of religious and cultural practices in varying degrees of intensity. Cooking and dietary choices in the diaspora are strong markers of ethnic identity and are the domain of women, particularly mothers. Saunders (2007: 204) points out that Hindus often equate living in India with a vegetarian diet, and living outside India with a non-vegetarian one. While this finding generally resonated with the narratives of the ten women, a news report (see Bose, 14 June 2016) referring to the sample registration system (SRS) baseline survey in 2014 released by the Registrar General of India, indicates that 71 percent of Indians over the age of 15 are non-vegetarian. Perhaps the association has more to do with reframing and creating new meanings about their social reality and unique transnational position in a globalised world, tied to two sites, India and South Africa. For the purposes of this paper, the women in the sample have been characterised according to the following dietary categories:

Table 1. *Dietary categories of the women.*

Diet	Number of women	Description of food
'Strictly' vegetarian	4	No meat; no eggs; no onion & garlic; no alcohol
'General' vegetarian	3	No meat; eggs included; no alcohol (2); alcohol (1)
'Specific' Non-vegetarian	2	Only white meat (chicken & fish); no red meat; no alcohol(1); Alcohol(1)
'General' Non-vegetarian	1	Meat included; alcohol included
Total	10	

Source: Author's Survey.

Table 1 indicates that more than half the sample (seven women), including their husbands and children, were vegetarian. The vegetarians comprised two types, namely, 'strictly' vegetarian and 'general' vegetarian. The former meant that not

only did they refrain from meat but also refrained from all animal products, eggs, alcohol and certain vegetarian food they considered 'stimulants' (such as onions and garlic, refraining from which, was referred to as a satvic or 'pure' diet). The three general vegetarians claimed that having lived in many parts of the world, they had learned to adapt to the limited vegetarian meal options in both work and public environments and included eggs in their diet. During fieldwork, it became evident that socially, vegetarians tend to keep the company of other expatriate vegetarians who prepared food in a way that was conducive to their daily Indian diet. Although not obvious, food preference and lifestyle factors such as fasting, rituals and non-alcoholism forged bonds and relationships that provided ethnic and more specifically, regional and caste solidarity among expatriates in the diaspora. It was also noted that vegetarians encouraged/imposed a vegetarian diet on their children. However, the younger generation appeared to be moving away from this practice in the diaspora. Among the general vegetarians, those children who consumed meat, had to partake in the eating of meat outside the household as their parents would not cook nor allow the presence of meat in the home. The irony was that although the household was vegetarian, the foodscape of its members was beginning to include non-vegetarian influences (from take-aways and food courts in shopping centres where meat was sold) much to the concern and sometimes embarrassment of parents. In an effort to cook 'healthy', 'fresh', 'home-cooked' meals, generational differences appeared to be compromising the role of the Indian mother in preserving tradition in the diaspora. While the women said they accepted their children's choices, participant observation among these families revealed an underlying tension that existed particularly with the negative association mothers made with a meat-eating diet as 'unhealthy', 'bad' and 'fast'. Ordering fast food (with meat) for home delivery was not acceptable either. The home space was associated with a vegetarian, Indian identity. D'Sylva and Beagan (2011:280) succinctly state that in diasporic contexts and among transnational migrant communities, "the purveyors of culture are often the women who are perceived to be keepers of tradition and sowers of culture in their families and the larger community. One of the central ways culture is transmitted – or transformed – is through food practices".

The two case studies to follow, illustrate the foodways and foodscapes of vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian women in the sample.

Case Study 1: Preeti and Renu

Preeti (30), a health worker by profession and Renu (42), a teacher by profession, have lived in Durban for over two years. They came from the same geographical region in Rajasthan, India. They met each other when socialising among non-resident Indian (NRI) families invited as guests attending cultural events at the Consulate General's office in Durban. Being 'general' vegetarians, with the same caste background and regional proximity, they share in common the same dialect, prayer and fasting

rituals. The two women became close friends as they lived in the same suburb and shared a carpool for transporting their children to school. They began shopping together for vegetarian dietary requirements from varied sources in Durban and India, learning where to access specific grains and other ingredients at different times of the year. This was soon followed by preparing and cooking meals together for auspicious fasting periods and rituals in their regional almanac. Through their foodwork and shared foodscapes, they were able to re-establish their regional identity and forge a sense of community among family and friends in South Africa. Their mothers and mothers-in-law continued to provide the guidance and support relating to food and the fasting calendar through Skype calls made every Sunday evening with the family in India. The women were mothers of children ranging from ages 6 to 16 years of age and were very strict with preparing vegetarian meals not only in the household but for school lunches as well as social gatherings (picnics, parties and school excursions). When they attended 'braais' (a South African form of barbecue) involving the grilling of meat, meat was substituted with soya products or grilled vegetables which were pre-cooked at home or prepared at the braai on a separate grill to avoid contact with the meat. When asked how she would react if her children wanted to eat meat, Preeti responded that she would not stop them but would be disappointed. While her daughter was vegetarian, Renu's son always ate meat (fast food) outside the home. She maintained that while she ignored it, she always reminded him that vegetarianism was an ancient practice that was becoming increasingly popular all over the world for health reasons. Although appearing anxious in discussing her son, she stated in a more composed manner: *"We have laid the foundation for good living...we have done our best teaching them their culture...as they grow older, it's up to them but we will give guidance."*

The case study above foregrounds the complexity of vegetarian foodways and its influence on ethnic identity in the diaspora. Ahmad (2014) alludes to how the dominant discourse still privileges vegetarianism and places it at the top of the caste hierarchy in Indian society, followed by meat-eaters/non-vegetarians who form the lowest rung of the pecking order. He links food as biological nutrition and cultural construct in understanding society, citing Khare (1992: 29) "the food we eat defines caste, moral character, homeland and sectarian affiliation". The sample of women claimed that the youth in the diaspora were influenced by exposure to diverse cultures, their peers and the media, adding that in India too, vegetarianism among the younger generation was slowly decreasing. They attributed this decline to globalization and the rapid growth of the Indian economy which had impacted Indian family norms, values and lifestyle. McMichael (2000), cited in Nandy (2004), on the rising incidence of meat

consumption in India, states that animal protein consumption signals rising affluence and emulation of western diets.

The three non-vegetarian women in the sample were raised in non-vegetarian households in India, married husbands with a non-vegetarian background and raised children who ate meat. They displayed two food preferences, namely, those who ate 'white meat' (chicken and fish) only, and those who ate both white and red meat (lamb and goat). Two of the three women consumed alcohol socially, outside the home. The following case study provides some insight into the non-vegetarian foodways of a woman in the sample.

Case Study 2: Anitha

Anitha (52), an engineer by profession, arrived in Durban five months prior to the interview. She is married to Jay (54) who is also an engineer, contracted to an international engineering company based in Durban. They have two children, a son (26) who is an engineer in Germany and a daughter (20) who is completing her studies in engineering in India. Anitha was eager to resign from her job in India to relocate with her husband and views living in South Africa as a 'time out' from employment. Although she returns to India every 2 to 3 months to visit her daughter (or flies her to Durban), she has quickly adapted to a domesticated life of cooking and cleaning while she settles into the new environment. Anitha says she finds the local food items, particularly the meat, of a high standard. She maintains that the local Indian restaurants she has visited thus far provide authentic Indian cuisine. She cooks for herself and her husband daily, making the same meals they would eat in India. Anitha's husband does not cook meals but assists with setting the table before meals and washing dishes after meals as the maid only works one day per week. She easily accesses all her ingredients at Spice Emporium, a local Indian food wholesaler, and from the local supermarkets in the upmarket suburb in which she lives. She said that while she substitutes ingredients not available in Durban with the local produce, she continues to buy her attar (flour) for chapatis (a hand-made bread), from India. Anitha cannot find a similar quality here in Durban, so she carries 5kg of the flour in her hand luggage on each return visit from India. A dietary change she has made in the short time she has lived in Durban includes eating more fruit and salad. She commented that, *"We are not used to eating a salad as a complete meal, it has always been an accompaniment or small side-dish... but we are learning to include more raw food into our normal diet of mainly cooked Indian food because it makes a lighter, healthy meal..."*

Her daughter lives with Anitha's mother in India and together with a full-time maid, they manage the household. Anitha says her daughter is too young to cook as yet but enjoys baking occasionally. Her son is unmarried and has lived in Germany for two years and does all his

own cooking, a combination of traditional Indian cooking and western foods. All three households (in South Africa, India and Germany) of this transnational family are non-vegetarian.

The case studies of two vegetarian women (Preeti and Renu) and a non-vegetarian woman (Anitha) and their families presented above provide a glimpse into the diversity that exists among Indian migrant foodways. The case studies suggest that the significance of the role of the mother and food in the Indian household is amplified in the diaspora. Their experiences indicate how cultural, gendered and symbolic influences of transnational food provisioning and consumption, re-create identity as well as an understanding of the self for the women in the diasporic context.

7. THE KITCHEN AS A CREATIVE SPACE

Srinivas (2006:199) maintains that in the diasporic Indian family, the links between motherhood and provisioning are engaged somewhat differently as nuclear Indian families find themselves with no family members, extended kin or servants to help. Indian women in the diasporic context are usually expected both by their families and by themselves to manage the household whether they work outside the home or not. Participant observation among the women revealed that the kitchen as a household space in the diaspora was not only a space that wields power over the provisioning and control of the family diet and identity, it was also a site of great creativity. The women prepared, cooked and presented 'tradition on a plate' in ways that were visually appealing to their children and satisfying to their husbands. The success of the mother/wife roles in the kitchen strongly influenced the good health, food choices and ethnic identity of the family.

The kitchen was also a space for reciprocity, camaraderie and 'sisterly' bonding among the Indian women. It presented a 'haven' (a familiar, safe and transformative space) where the women shared recipes, communicated in the mother tongue, recollected stories, expressed their concerns, reminisced about India, and developed culinary skills or what LeBesco and Naccarato (2008:236) term, 'culinary capital'. In the transnational context, culinary capital refers to more than cooking skills and competencies for the purposes of a supplementary income for the women. The authors also refer to culinary capital as a resource that includes 'food and food practises as vehicles for performing an illusionary identity' (Ibid: 236). In this instance, it refers to re-creating Indian cuisine in the host country as well as a hidden, empowering transmission of knowledge that occurs during socialization, from past generations of women (mothers and grandmothers in India), and in the diaspora, from the familial (mothers-in-law) and fictive kin networks of the expatriates.

Six of the ten women interviewed were engaged in household based cooking activities, as indicated in Table 2 below. Three specific informal income generating activities included cooking and baking Indian speciality cuisine to order (such as breyanis, savouries and sweetmeats), catering of Indian food at small events, and the hosting of cooking classes in authentic regional Indian cuisine.

Table 2. *Home based cooking activities of the women.*

Home based activity	Number of women	Food items produced
Cooking and baking to order	3	Breyanis, curries, handmade breads, savoury snacks, sweetmeats, gluten-free items
Small event catering	1	Breyanis, curries, savoury snacks, handmade breads, and sweetmeats for 100 people or less
Cooking classes	2	3–5 day cooking course in regional-specific cuisine

Source: Author's Survey.

Table 2 above illustrates that the women engaged in income generating activities drawing on their culinary capital. They referred their family and friends to each other to support their home-based economic enterprises. The women relied extensively on the patronage of other Indian women (both local and expatriate) to support their culinary initiatives. The kitchen became a platform for entrepreneurial projects and through informal income generation, the women were able to elevate their economic status in the household and restore a sense of independence for themselves. All six women claimed they had found a niche market in the demand for vegetarian dishes, particularly among local (South African) Indian families.

While the women in the sample led relatively insular lives revolving mainly among their family, expatriate networks and South African Indian clientele, it was the time spent in the host country that determined the degree of assimilation in multicultural contexts. Among the ten women, it was mainly through entertaining their husbands' colleagues and socialising with their children's friends' parents at school events that brought them into close contact with other race groups in South Africa. It was in such instances that the women shared their culinary expertise and cultural background with local South Africans. The researcher was invited to a 'taste of India' evening by one of the women in the sample. Seema (40) was hosted as a 'guest chef' by her neighbour, the owner of a local coffee shop. She cooked a combination of Punjabi and Marathi cuisine for the dinner which was open to the public and attended by a range of people from different ethnic groups. It was an opportunity to debut her food skills to people interested in Indian food and cooking lessons in the regional cuisine.

Similarly, the case study of Jyothi, a young mother and wife of a South African Indian husband, highlights the resourcefulness and challenges of women migrants in the diaspora.

Case Study 3: Jyothi

Jyothi (36) lived in Delhi before marrying a South African Indian (a farmer and businessman). She subsequently emigrated to a small town in the midlands of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. In India she lived in a vegetarian, extended family and was a physical education teacher by profession. Her family of five siblings are well educated as her parents encouraged them to pursue higher education before getting married. She has a sister who is also married in South Africa and the two women are the first members of their family to migrate overseas. Her husband's farm is part of a joint family business that includes timber farming and animal husbandry and which involves her father-in-law, brothers-in-law and local farm staff. She had not learnt to drive a car in South Africa as yet, so she did not have the independence she aspired to. She learned how to cook from her mother-in-law, as her family in South Africa ate meat. She cooked meat for her husband and his family but retained her vegetarianism, and her young child was vegetarian. To avoid contact with the blood of the meat (chicken and mutton) in preparing meals, she purchased pre-packed portions from the supermarket. She said her siblings were very proud of her adjustment in South Africa as she didn't know how to cook back home. In India, her mother and older sisters did all the cooking and fasting preparation. She commented that *"In India, the women are always vegetarian and they do all the cooking...the men eat outside the house if they want meat"*. Both Jyothi and her child speak Hindi, English and Zulu. She had started a small, informal yoga class amongst the town residents. From teaching these classes, she was able to develop a home-based food business, catering vegetarian food items to the small number of Hindu and Muslim families living in the area. She sells mainly vegetable breyani, sweetmeats and savouries such as stuffed pakora (locally referred to as 'samoosa'). She also makes 'paneer' a form of homemade cheese, by using the milk of her father-in-law's cows on the farm. Jyothi also added to her menu vegetarian food items for people suffering with allergies, such as lentil pancakes (for clients with gluten intolerance). Combining yoga classes and vegetarian food catering has earned her the recognition of a health and lifestyle 'instructor' in the town. Jyothi uses the income she generates to save for her son's education. She has earned respect within the household for her creativity and entrepreneurship. Her agency at growing vegetable gardens on the farm was also appreciated as it brought financial benefit to the joint family as well as the growth of her own food business.

Jyothi's case study is relevant in illustrating the adjustment Indian women expatriates, particularly mothers, make in foreign environments as well as their interaction with the local population. Her foodscape, which includes the farm, her yoga groups in the town-hall and the residences of local families, has

prompted the production of gluten-free food items and the beginning of vegetable gardens. Her foodwork and agency in the kitchen has led to sustainable activities such as the growing of vegetables on the farm which have the potential for creating employment and the skilling of local farm workers in the future.

8. CONCLUSION

The study of Indian women expatriates in South Africa is an exploratory one and the small sample size cannot be used to draw generalizations about the larger population. However, the study does foreground three key issues: that the foodways of the sample of expatriate Indian women and their families in South Africa is a negotiation of practices and beliefs around food preference; that in transnational trajectories, food is able to evoke ideas of identity and a sense of familiarity for the migrant and that, by examining the symbolic meaning of food, further insight into the evolving Indian family as well as its gender dimensions are underscored. It sheds light on how women, particularly mothers, promote regional and religious food choices within and outside the household to reassert an Indian ethnic identity. Further to this, the study elaborates the ‘culinary capital’ of the women – an accumulated resource of ideas, skills and experiences transmitted from a bevy of significant female authority figures (including grandmothers, mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and fictive kin) – in empowering the women in the household as well as defining themselves as individuals. The study indicates how the kitchen as a creative space in the household bestows upon the women the power to influence the family diet, caste and regional identity as well as generate a supplementary income. Overall, the study foregrounds the dynamism in the foodways, foodscapes and culinary capital of Indian expatriate women in the diaspora.

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About the author: *Gerelene Jagganath* holds a PhD degree from the School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. She is an anthropologist and her research interests include migration and diaspora, youth and substance abuse, and women and work in Africa.