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Making Sense of 'Homemaking' in the Diaspora

The Case of the Indo-Surinamese Hindustanis in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Diaspora groups across the world have been known for adopting and inventing processes and forms of 'homemaking' in their host lands. This article brings into focus the methods of homemaking assumed by the Indo-Surinamese Hindustani diaspora in the Netherlands, which owes its origin to colonial dispersal. Considering their status as a 'twice-migrant' diaspora, the process may appear to be distinctly difficult for the Hindustanis, a position this article seeks to examine. The article interrogates the notion of homemaking in the case of the Hindustanis through ethnographic conversational interviews of Indo-Surinamese interlocutors—a unique perspective based on personal histories and everyday experiences.

Keywords

diaspora – Hindustanis – homemaking – Netherlands – Sarnami Hindi

1 Introduction

In early December 2021, a cultural event taking place in the administrative capital of the Netherlands, Den Haag (The Hague), captivated the attention of this author, a close observer of ethnic minority diasporas in Europe. A colourful troupe of young Hindustani women and men performed the Kuchipudi—a classical dance form that originated in the south of India—in the presence of the Dutch queen, Maxima, the mayor of the city of Den Haag and numerous

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members of the political elite.[1] It was undoubtedly a momentous occasion for the Dutch Indo-Caribbean diaspora—or the Hindustanis—in the Netherlands.

This community was created by primarily Dutch-speaking, Indian-origin migrants who arrived from Suriname, a country in Caribbean Latin America and a former Dutch colony. Ever since the independence of Suriname in 1975 and the subsequent policy of the Dutch state to resettle émigrés from its former colony in cities such as Den Haag, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the Hindustanis—a prominent ethnic minority group—have established themselves in the Netherlands, together with fellow émigrés from Afro-Creole and Javanese diaspora groups. According to 2001 statistics from IMES (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, University of Amsterdam), close to 309,000 Surinamese live in the Netherlands. Although there are no official numbers available for Hindustanis residing in the Netherlands, various estimates suggest that the number is between 110,000 (Van der Avoird, 2001) and 150,000 (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal, 2003: 3). According to Ellen Bal (2012), the 'Indian diaspora' in the Netherlands includes approximately 160,000 Hindustanis and 21,729 Indians. *DutchNews.nl*, the leading online English-language news portal in the Netherlands, estimated the number of 'Indians'—Hindustanis and expat Indians—to be 220,000 in September 2019, the second-largest group of this diaspora after that in the United Kingdom. The number of Surinamese Hindus in the Netherlands could be anywhere between approximately 80,000 and 100,000 (Baumann, 2000). A more recent approximation is provided by Priya Swamy (2020), who makes a wide estimate of between 100,000 and 215,000 Hindus in the Netherlands, eighty per cent of whom are of Surinamese Hindu descent. A majority live in Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague—the last being the 'Hindustani hub' of the Netherlands, with about 50,000 people. As of the year 2002, about 18,570 Hindustanis were living in Amsterdam (Choenni, 2013).

In the subsequent paragraphs, this paper seeks to understand and articulate the process of homemaking as accomplished by the Indo-Surinamese Dutch diaspora in the Netherlands through the lived experiences of its women.[2] Significantly, it narrativises the distinct processes of assimilation, acculturation

1 Information obtained from personal interaction with participants of the event in Den Haag.

2 Several works have focused on the position of women in the Indo-Caribbean diasporas. Particularly significant is the work of Rosanne Kanhai (*Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*, 2011). Sherry Anne Singh's article on the role of women in the enactment of the *Ramayana* is crucial to understanding everyday feminist negotiations in diasporic communities.

and integration of Hindustani[3] young women, but at the same time articulates the ways in which they have attempted to keep the cultural ethos of the community alive through language preservation, the practice of religion and classical and folk forms of art.[4] One of the significant ways in which the community has strived to maintain cultural links with the 'spiritual homeland' (India) and the 'homeland' (Suriname—being twice migrants) is through watching Hindi films and listening to Hindi film music played by Hindustani radio stations. In fact, the paper argues that the Hindustanis' viewing of Hindi films and patronage of Hindi music exceeds the limits of a practice or habit and inhabits the realm of a community tradition.

The general understanding of the term 'homemaking', specifically in its heavily gendered classification of 'homemaker', refers to the idealised conception of women being responsible for making the home liveable for the family through several socially cultivated activities, such as fulfilling familial responsibilities, taking time off from work, and so on. This article does not consider the gendered dimension of 'homemaking' but rather attempts to situate the narratives of its interlocutors within the theoretical framework considering the 'homing' desire of the Indo-Surinamese diasporic community, which expressly refers to the everyday negotiations performed by diasporas, as articulated by scholars like Avtar Brah (1996), Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (2000) and Floya Anthias (2012).

1.1 *Research Design and Methodology*

The paper is primarily based on long-form, ethnographic conversational interviews conducted mainly with four key interlocutors over a period of a month—December 2020—through online platforms (MS Teams, Skype) and short-

3 The term 'Hindustani' refers colloquially to groups in the colonial labour diaspora that experienced dispersal during the 18th and 19th centuries owing to their origin in the Indo-Gangetic plains of India. It also refers to the hybrid language spoken by the diaspora in sites of initial settlement and community formation, such as Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, as well as sites of final settlement, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. A poignant reference is found in the *Kala Paani* literary narratives, a postcolonial literature that refers to the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by scores of economically disenfranchised Indian labourers under the pernicious indenture system, from 1883 to 1917 (Mehta, 2010).

4 A significant trend has emerged in the historiography of indenture in recent decades—looking at the experiences of women (Kumar, 2017). While one approach portrays women under the indenture system as a 'sorry sisterhood' subject to sexual exploitation, the other approach highlights the possibilities created by indenture for women to escape sociocultural oppression within Indian society. This article moves beyond these approaches and focuses on the postcolonial, post-second-migration narratives of Indo-Surinamese diasporic women in the Netherlands.

messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, owing to Covid-induced travel restrictions. The initial conversations were followed up with interviews with specific questions. The format of the interviews included a methodological approach of initiating a free-flowing conversation punctuated with a few definite questions related to date and time of migration of the family, and detailed accounts of engagement with religious rituals or exposure to media forms, such as Bollywood films or music. This format was selected in order to enable the interlocutors to feel comfortable during the process of the interviews, which were conducted—in a few cases—over several online sessions. The conversational interview method is best suited to gathering ethnographic material from members of the community with whom personal rapport and bonds have already been established. The interviews form the core of the argument that this paper attempts to build towards a larger, more broad-based research focus on the modes and methods of cultural preservation among the Hindustani population in the Netherlands.

The goal of these interviews was to learn about the practices and engagements of the community from the members of the community themselves, in their own words (Munz, 2017: 455–457). All the interviews were conducted in English, a language in which all the interlocutors are proficient, even though they are native speakers of Dutch. A few interludes were in Hindi, especially during the conversation surrounding Hindi film music. Both the interviewer and the interviewees are familiar with the Hindi language and its variants, such as the Bhojpuri dialect, particularly with reference to cultural forms. The interviews were recorded by the author in the form of written notes, and online recordings were maintained for future reference. Some of the interlocutors expressly desired that their names be kept confidential; they have been referred to obliquely in the course of this paper.

2 Theoretical Position

The social constructionists among diaspora theorists have sought to deconstruct two core building blocks of diasporas—the notion of 'home' or 'homeland' and the desire to recreate ethnic or religious communities. It is also understood that instead of viewing these processes in a rigid, unidimensional manner, they must be located within the larger landscape of intersectionality, multiculturality and cultural fluidity. According to Avtar Brah (1996), the 'homing' desire of a diasporic community does not necessarily mean desire for the 'homeland'. She associated the concept of home with the everyday lived experiences of diasporic communities the world over, mediated by historically spe-

cific social relations. The social constructionist definition of home, therefore, has been generously interpreted and decoded through two different indices—the place of origin and the place of settlement. Both these places could be 'home'. There was always a local, national and a transnational home for the diasporas as they formed virtual and imagined communities, defined by a matrix of unknown experiences as well as a web of intimate social relations.

Floya Anthias (2012) critiqued notions of 'origin' and 'true belonging' as absolutist, adding that such absolutism glossed over the internal discrepancies and divisions within communities while at the same time focusing on selective cultural negotiations. The social constructionist, Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (2000), has emphasised new topographies and practices of citizenship, membership, claims-making and belonging among and between diasporic communities, delineating multiconnected, multireferential and postnational communities as sites of such transformations.

The postcolonial diasporas are specifically notable in this regard. While communities were formed due to transnational dislocations that resulted from colonialism and nation-building, historically disenfranchised people developed strategies to challenge their subordinate status. Studies on postcolonial diasporas have therefore foregrounded the diasporic practices of both the forcefully exiled and the voluntarily displaced. Steven Vertovec (2004) has outlined certain traits that could be discerned across diasporas, focusing specifically on the South Asian/British Indian diaspora. These traits range from the expression of collective identity to the establishment of networks of exchange and communication, from ethnic solidarities to the maintenance of implicit and explicit ties with the homeland and—generally speaking—the inability to be fully accepted by the host society.

The growth, establishment and relative success of the 'Indian' (for our purposes the erstwhile British Indian) diaspora has developed into a cynosure of research over the years. In her work, Amba Pande has attempted to situate the Indian diaspora within the larger context of world diasporas and the distinct paths of growth and development that each has followed. Lomarsh Roopnarine (2003) has argued that world capitalism, imperialism and colonialism exacerbated internal factors of emigration both in India and the Caribbean. Interestingly, the Indian diaspora itself could be categorised variously, owing to its patterns and fashion of migration, dispersion and settlement; host-land participation; homeland consciousness; and the construction of a multilocational 'self' (Pande, 2013: 59, 60). The vast variety of people of Indian origin who live outside India therefore could be broadly classified as the 'old' and the 'new' diasporas. While the old diaspora owes its existence primarily to indenture and other similar systems, convict settlements, trading and non-trading

communities (major sites include the Caribbean, Indo-Pacific islands like Fiji, South Africa, East Africa and so on),[5] the new diaspora is seen to have followed a migratory path to countries in the West and Southeast Asia, as students and professionals as well as the political diaspora. The Indo-Surinamese or the Dutch Hindustanis can be classified as part of the indentured labour diaspora with the distinction of being 'twice migrants' or 'twice banished', as Brij Lal has categorised them. The historical trajectory of the Dutch Hindustanis is also distinct from other 'twice-migrant' diasporas, such as the East African Indians who made parts of the UK their home.

The concern of this paper remains the story of homemaking of the Indo-Surinamese diaspora, predominantly in the Netherlands, with its distinct history of double migration. Scholars such as Brij Lal (2021) and Ashutosh Kumar (2017) have worked extensively on the history of indenture and colonial servitude of subjects who later formed full-blown diasporic communities, both in the lands of their indenture and in postcolonial Western host lands. Ruben Gowricharn (2004, 2013), Chan Choenni (2013, 2014), Kanthika Sinha-Kerkhoff and Ellen Bal (2007, 2003), and Jaswina Bihari-Elahi (2020), have provided a scholarly view of the Hindustanis from 'within',[6] while Priya Swamy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020) has written widely on processes of religious consolidation around space in the Netherlands—a view from the 'outside'.[7] A significant gap, however, exists in scholarship on diasporan Hindustanis—often grouped with labour-diaspora compatriots in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and parts of the Indo-Pacific—with regard to the process of homemaking and the construction of the communal 'self', and hence this paper seeks to initiate an important scholarly inquiry, albeit from the outside.[8] Despite sharing a history of colonial servitude and indenture with Indo-Caribbean and Indo-Pacific communities, the Hindustanis in Suriname and the Netherlands have traversed a unique and distinctive path towards eventual progress and development.

Diasporas have established transnational 'homelands' by constructing new homes and communities as well as building social networks. The role of the family in this process remains undeniable, along with religion, the idea of constructing a new space, establishing ethnic areas or enclaves and building places

5 Around 1.5 million labourers were exported to different colonies around the world, like Mauritius, Uganda, Nigeria, Guyana, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, Natal, Suriname, Jamaica, Fiji and Burma (Pande, 2013: 61).

6 Ruben Gowricharn, Chann Choenni and Jaswina Bihari-Elahi are first- or second-generation migrants from Suriname, whereas Sinha-Kerkhoff is Dutch.

7 Priya Swamy is a Canadian-Dutch scholar of Indian heritage.

8 This author is Indian and has spent a considerable number of years living in parts of Europe, including the Netherlands.

of worship. The Hindustani diaspora has been no different, with certain distinctions. By reimagining nostalgia and representations of the original or the adopted homeland, maintaining cultural values and traditions and reproducing transnational social and cultural phenomena, the Indo-Surinamese diaspora in the Netherlands has formed part of the multicultural ethnoscape of the Dutch society. Avtar Brah (1996) has defined 'home' in the diasporic context thus:

> What is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this case it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day … all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.

The process of homemaking therefore is complicated, needing to be buttressed by factors such as the political and social possibility of it in the host land and the coming together of cultural elements, such as language and religion, and the formation of transcultural and transnational links through music, cinema, media and, more recently, virtual connectivity.

3 Understanding the Hindustanis

An initial sense of 'exile' and 'loss' punctuated the literary and historical expression of the labour diaspora—known also by the pejorative term 'coolie diaspora'—in the colonial world (Mishra, 2005). Even though present-day people of Indian origin refer to themselves as Hindustanis (*Hindoestanen* in Dutch, which essentially translates into 'someone from India or Hindustan'), this was not always the case. Initially, they too were known as 'coolies' (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal, 2003: 4013).[9] In 1927, the legal status of the former indentured labourers changed and they were given the same rights as Dutch citizens who resided in Suriname. Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal's view that this decision may have been prompted by a Dutch state desirous of the labourers settling down in Suriname

9 It is imperative to note here that the term 'coolie' has serious racial connotations and is being used in this article to highlight the fact itself and in order to contextualise the position and situation of the indentured population in colonial and postcolonial spaces.

may well be irrefutable, as a considerable number stayed behind attracted by the lure of owning land.[10] Subsequently, at the dawn of Suriname's independence from the Dutch, simultaneously with the Afro-Surinamese the Hindustanis migrated yet again, to the Netherlands. Therefore, Brij Lal has called them the 'twice banished' (Lal, 2012: 156).

Nalini Harnam, a fifty-two-year-old resident of Den Haag, is one such Hindustani who migrated to the Netherlands with her family, in April 1977; she was about nine years old at the time. In accordance with Dutch policy, the family—along with scores of others—was settled in Den Haag.

> The oldest brother came to Holland first to study and work, followed by my elder sister who came here to train as a nurse. They in turn sent for the other siblings. My parents and me—being one of the youngest—migrated later. In fact, one person from every family chose to come to Holland.[11]

The family eventually chose to settle on Paul Krugerlaan in Den Haag, a neighbourhood that gradually developed into a vibrant urban space for Hindustanis. In the words of Siela Ardjoesemito-Jethoe, a young academic and community activist also based in Den Haag, 'While the Dutch policy was to settle the Indo-Surinamese in Den Haag and the Afro-Surinamese in Amsterdam, the Javanese were given space in Rotterdam.'[12]

The city of Den Haag therefore—known the world over as The Hague or the city of justice and peace—grew into a multicultural urban conglomeration with a significant population of Hindustani people who considered it their 'home away from home'. As more Hindustani families moved to Paul Krugerlaan (and Den Haag), the cultural and spatial ethos began to change.[13] Nalini recounted that as the demographic composition of the neighbourhood sought to include more members of her community, white Dutch families began to

10 The Dutch state offered them land for free in order to encourage them to stay.

11 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

12 Interview, Siela, 12.12.2020.

13 The sites of settlement of the Indo-Surinamese diaspora in the Netherlands are significant, since cities such as Amsterdam, Den Haag and Rotterdam are also home to large Afro-Surinamese and Javanese Surinamese diasporas. Amsterdam in particular has been the location of a cultural tug-of-war between the Afro-Surinamese Dutch population and the Dutch Hindustanis, particularly over space-making claims. Priya Swamy (2016 and forthcoming) has written extensively about the Dutch Hindustanis' struggle for spatial control and temple-building in Amsterdam—a claim that the community associates with historical pride and identity formation in the host land, i.e. the Netherlands.

move away. 'As a result, interaction between the communities—the Hindustani minority and the Dutch majority—was limited or non-existent, especially in the early years of our settlement there', she added.[14] Hindustani families lived in close proximity and as a result the likelihood of jointly organising and celebrating festivals was high.

The process of homemaking was thus initiated in earnest through the public practice of religious rituals and festivals like Holi ('we played Holi on the streets').[15] The personal ritual space within Nalini's home where the Diwali *puja* used to be performed gradually drew a larger amalgam of people from the neighbourhood. 'My mother would perform the *puja* on Diwali[16] and all of us would gather. Even people from the neighbourhood,' she reminisced.[17] Similar communal grouping occurred around impromptu *Baithak Gaana*[18] gatherings at her family home. She remembers her father sitting down with a *dholak* (a rhythm-based Indian musical instrument used commonly for musical performances in North and Central India) and his friends joining him in an improvised celebration of Hindustani folk music, which they had brought with them all the way from India to Suriname and then to the Netherlands.

Siela's encounter with homemaking in the midst of a majority white Dutch population was considerably distinctive, as she grew up in remote Friesland, away from the bustle of the urban neighbourhoods in Den Haag. The young woman narrated:

> Although we were brought up with Hindu traditions and rituals, we never really had other people with whom we could relate. Of course, there were

14 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

15 Holi is a spring festival observed by Indian as well as Indian-origin Hindus in the diaspora, particularly those with roots in the Indo-Gangetic plains. The festival is marked by its adherents with religious rituals, throwing coloured water and dye powders on each other, and consuming intoxicants.

16 Observed during the lunisolar month of Kartika (Hindu calendar), Diwali is popularly known as the Festival of Lights. It is one of the most popular festivals in Hinduism, and marks the 'spiritual victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance, hence holding a special significance for the diasporic Hindus, particularly the twice-migrant indentured labour diasporas.

17 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

18 *Baithak Gaana* is a form of music that migrated along with the indentured labour diaspora and a unique form of it originated in Suriname as communities began to be formed. A *baithak* is a social gathering. It is a mix of Bhojpuri folk songs with other Caribbean and creole influences. It is similar to the 'chutney music' that originated in Trinidad and Tobago, also among the labour immigrants. The most popular musicians of the genre in Suriname were Ramdew Chaitoe and Dropati.

> celebrations and festivals like Holi, Diwali and Rakshabandhan[19] but they were also restricted to the home space and shared only with relatives.[20]

Born in Friesland, the youngest of fourteen children, Siela's memories are mostly made up of the fact that 'Mother always wore *sindoor* and created a small temple in the attic' and 'woke up at 4 am in the morning to cook for Father and us'. She remembers her mother keeping the children in check by constantly reminding them of societal concerns and propriety ('*samaj ka boli*' [what will society say?]) even though there was no Hindustani community to speak of in Friesland. 'My father's sister lived in another village in the Friesland region. This was our only community!'[21]

The lack of a community and isolation made it difficult for the family to come to terms with the anxieties of migration. This drove her father to immerse himself in work without the luxury or leisure to develop any meaningful friendships or relationships. Being unable to speak Dutch not only contributed to the isolation; in fact, it made it impossible to interact outside the community. During one of the interviews, Siela lamented growing up outside of the 'broad family structure' due to their isolated location in a remote part of the Netherlands in her formative years. 'One positive that came out of our isolation was the fact that I grew up learning and speaking Bhojpuri—the language of our forebears—and also learnt some Hindi,' she stated.[22]

A crucial element of the process of homemaking for the Hindustanis in the initial years was language (in this case languages) as the community spoke Sarnami Hindi and Dutch. While Bhojpuri—or creolised Sarnami Hindi—was the original lingua franca of many Hindustanis, many came to the Netherlands having learnt Hindi at school in Suriname. Nalini was one such. 'I was taught Hindi in Suriname and continued to learn the language after we moved to Den Haag. When I was 13 years old, I would go every Sunday to Ekta Bhawan[23] for Hindi classes,' she said.[24] Although she spoke only Bhojpuri with her father, Siela learnt Hindi from one of her eldest sisters who had received a diploma

19 The festival signifies Hindu familial relationships, particularly between male and female siblings. In a show of affection, sisters tie colourful strings around the wrists of their brothers.

20 Interview, Siela, 12.12.2020.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview, Siela, 12.12.2020.

23 Ekta Bhawan is a large community centre set up and managed by the Hindustani community in Den Haag. It consists of a temple, classrooms for Hindi classes as well as community halls for public gatherings and so on.

24 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

in Hindi language in Suriname and would teach her siblings the language on Sundays.[25] Religion and ritual practices played a dominant role in the life of the family and much of it was related to the knowledge of languages like Hindi and Bhojpuri that the children attained. 'We grew up reading religious texts. One of our favourites was the Hanuman Chalisa, but we also learnt a plethora of *bhajans* (religious songs) and *mantras* (Hindu religious incantations) from mother—the family's religious and spiritual anchor,' Siela recollected.[26] It is worth mentioning that Siela herself assumed the mantle in her own family, even qualifying as a certified Hindu priestess later in life! She was driven by a desire to find the meaning of the rituals she practised and had passed on to her sons. 'We even got homework', she recounted and performed a *puja* herself as an examination!

The place of language in homemaking was not always primary nor was it irreplaceable. When the sixteen-year-old Siela moved from Friesland to Den Haag—to the Hindustani conglomeration—she expected to use her proficiency in Sarnami Hindi where possible but was disappointed to realise that the Hindustani city-dwellers spoke very little or none of the language. 'One of my first friends in Den Haag was a Hindustani girl who spoke no Sarnami Hindi whatsoever,' Siela narrated.[27] A number of first-generation elite Hindustanis who were settled in the urban spaces in the Netherlands did not encourage their children to learn the language, and often reprimanded them for doing so. For them, Dutch was better; it was the language of upward mobility, progress and integration. The desire for assimilation into the larger Dutch milieu remained an important personal and, for some, communal, goal. It thus could be inferred that neighbourhoods such as Paul Krugerlaan were never really preferred by the elite Hindustanis, who eventually chose more 'Dutch' areas to live in. 'Communicating with the locals was never a problem for us Hindustanis as we already knew Dutch. In the Netherlands too, we went to a Dutch school, so it was easy,' related Nalini.[28]

Religion and its practice played a considerable role in homemaking for the Hindustanis in the Netherlands. Similar to their forebears in the plantations of Suriname, who carried with them the epics—the *Ramayana* specifically—and practised and performed them frequently in a bid to establish a community in their inexplicable and harsh living conditions, community-making in their new adopted homeland revolved around the private and public practice of religion

25 Interview, Siela, 12.12.2020.
26 Ibid.
27 Interview, Siela, 12.12.2020.
28 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

and religious festivals. The colonial labour diaspora—in the countries of their servitude and eventual settlement—considered Hinduism as their connection to the 'great tradition' of India (Cohen, 2008). Even though Brahmins remained at the forefront of ritual practices and orthodox forms of Hinduism became prevalent on the plantations, the Hindus relied on India to provide spiritual and religious sustenance. Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec (1991) have written extensively about the evolution of Caribbean Hinduism as an ethnicisation of religion under Brahmin leadership. Religion, therefore, formed a vital link between the diaspora and their homeland and the *Ramayana* emerged as the 'essential text of the Hindu diaspora' (Cohen, 2008). As Nalini remembers, 'we had a huge copy of the *Ramayana* at home. Our father would lock the four youngest siblings into the room, bolt the door and recite from the text. Of course, we were not allowed to laugh or talk during the recital.'[29]

The *Ramayana* could have been prominent in the lives of the Hindustanis because of four primary reasons, one of which pertains to the central theme of the epic—exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return. Even though the possibility of return did not materialise for most of them nor did many desire to return to the country of their birth, the epic tale of struggle and suffering resonated with the community, which faced immensely difficult conditions on the plantations.

Furthermore, the text is a simple, uncomplicated story of the victory of good over evil—useful in the harsh world of the plantation and later during the early years of resettlement in the Netherlands. The epic also forms a moral code for the dominant Hindu ideology and appeals to the community because of its largely casteless character. In fact, the epic stresses the physical prowess and economic resourcefulness of the lower castes.

The *Ramayana*—the story of the trials and tribulations of Lord Rama—provided a balm for the bruised soul of a displaced people (Lal, 2021: 7). The community drew sustenance from his enlightenment as well as the entertaining recitals of the epic. The antiphonal style of singing Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas*—a rendering of Lord Rama's story in the Avadhi language by the North Indian Brahmin poet Tulsidas—emerged as one of the three key genres of Bhojpuri-region narrative song among the Indo-Caribbean labour diaspora (Manuel, 2012: 116), the Hindustanis in Suriname being no different. In the late nineteenth century, a version of Bhojpuri mixed with Avadhi became the standardised lingua franca in Trinidad, Suriname and British Guiana. This was a result of the clustering of the *purabiyas* (people from the east of India) in

29 Ibid.

ethnically homogenous villages, and their avoidance of (sometimes hostile) blacks, arrogant white people and proselytising Christian missionary schools (Manuel, 2012: 118). A result of this was that, in parallel to their cousins in the Bhojpuri heartland, many Indo-Caribbeans acquired a passive understanding of medieval Avadhi through the renditions of the *Ramcharitmanas*, cherished predominantly as a devotional text.

A common theme of mutual cohesion on the ships that ferried the labour migrants to different lands was the dissolution of caste affiliations (Gowricharn, 2004, 2013; Choenni, 2013, 2014; Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal, 2003; Bihari-Elahi, 12.12.2020). They referred to each other as '*jahaji bhai*' (ship brother) and '*jahaji behen*' (ship sister), shrugging off their former beliefs and structural and social dogmas and traditions.[30] 'One positive aspect that came out of colonial servitude and indenture was the abrogation of caste among the labour diasporas. Our forebears left the caste system behind in India', stated one of the key interlocutors of this paper, a young female academic and political activist based in Den Haag.[31] Through the application of the process of ethnogenesis, Ruben Gowricharn (2013) has demonstrated that Hindustani community and society formation in ethnically diverse Suriname was most successful, driven by internal as well as primordial factors, such as quasi group formation, the rise of an ethnic ideology and the invocation of collective pride. His focus on 'douglarisation' elicits interesting insights into aspects of ethnicisation and race-mixing in pre- and postcolonial Suriname as well as its impact on subsequent diaspora formation among the Dutch Hindustanis (Gowricharn, 2020). Many practices and institutions of traditional India, including caste, did not survive the crossing of the seas, as indentured labourers were recruited as individuals and not as caste or ethnic groups (Lal, 2021: 3). On the plantations, they were rewarded and compensated on the basis of their individual hard work and not according to their social or ritual status. Furthermore, people from all caste groups were housed together in rudimentary dwellings or collectively at the home of one person where everyone consumed food together and often from the same pots.[32]

30 Information obtained from interlocutor. Interview held in December 2020.

31 Interview, 12.12.2020.

32 The works of Maurits S. Hassankhan and Rosemarijn Hoefte are also remarkable in this context.

4 Gender and Homemaking in the Netherlands

To set the context for this section of the paper, let me narrate a thrilling story.[33] During the time of indentured recruitment in India, a strange fate befell a young woman from Balrampur in Bihar (then in British India). While escaping her marital home and village, where she was abused, she came upon people who convinced her to get on their *ghoda gaadi* (horse cart), saying they were en route to Calcutta. Little did she know that this deceit would lead her to a ship that would set sail for distant shores. Relatives came looking for the young woman, but she was by then well and truly on her way. On the ship, she met people from her *gaon* (village). Considering the young woman's transcendent beauty and her young age, the *gaon wallahs* (villagers) advised her to marry again in order to protect herself from 'prying eyes'. She relented and was married off to another man from the village in a hurriedly conducted *nikaah* ceremony. Eventually she arrived in Suriname with her new-found family and stayed with them till the end of her life. Little is known about her religious and cultural background, but it would be sufficient to assume that she was Muslim—at least by marriage—when she arrived in Suriname.[34] The young woman was one of the many who underwent a rite of passage not simply limited to crossing the *Kala Paani* (literally translated as 'the black waters' but referring also to 'crossing the seven seas') but also in terms of personal circumstances as well as social status and relations.

Immediately on arrival in Suriname, the position of women changed. As the first shiploads of indentured immigrants started to fan out into the plantations, it was realised that the number of women was far lower than the number of men. The women thus found themselves in an unenviable position, particularly with regard to freedom of choice: patriarchal structures prevented them from exercising such choice. In the anecdote recounted above, we note the way in which the young woman was 'married off' on the ship so that she would not be considered fair game for other men.

When the Hindustanis migrated for the second time, to the Netherlands—as Hindustanis—they carried with them these structural anomalies, which later became established as the community developed as a diaspora. Some of the elements of unequal gender relations extended to social practices such as marriage. One of the key interviewees of this paper, who is not Hindustani by ethnicity but became part of the community by marriage, recounts how it was

33 Interview, 12.12.2020.

34 The facts represented in the story have been reproduced based on an interview with one of the key interlocutors for this paper in December 2020.

taboo for the Hindustanis to marry outside their community even as late as 1998. She faced immense resistance from her Hindustani in-laws as she had dared to break the tradition, breach the patriarchal barrier and marry the eldest son of the family. 'In the months leading up to the marriage, I was not allowed to meet their friends and family. They were ashamed as I was not from the community,' she said.[35]

Several other gender-specific issues came to the fore as my interlocutor negotiated her place and space in a culture that appeared to exclude foreigners—especially if they were women. One of them was on account of the rampant colorism prevalent in the family. 'One of the major obstacles to my "acceptance" in the family was the colour of my skin. As a dark-skinned woman, I was subjected to constant torment and comments like "Wish my son had married someone with lighter skin"', she recounted.[36] When this interlocutor travelled to her husband's native village in Suriname, his relatives often touched her skin to ascertain if she was really that dark or wore make-up! Clearly, the apparent emancipation that took place in terms of caste had not percolated down to gender relations and breakdown of patriarchal structures.

During an interview, this interlocutor recounted a conversation she had had with a psychologist friend who told her, 'a majority of young women who consult me having attempted suicide at least once are second-generation Hindustanis'.[37] This might be attributed to various forms of social and communal oppression that prevail within the community in a largely liberal milieu such as the Netherlands. Women, thus, find themselves trapped in a dichotomous social situation—between principally conservative families and community, and a sexually liberated society. In the words of the interlocutor, 'My son went to a Hindu school frequented by Hindustani families and the one thing I noticed was how the women had trouble standing up for themselves or expressing their opinion.' Structures of obedience and silence prevail within the family structure, which results in inadequate social confidence and development. 'Hindustani children often have a difficult time reading and comprehending what they read. This is as per the national statistics in the Netherlands,' she added.[38] Much of it has to do with the ritual-bound traditional families they come from where obedience is considered a social virtue.

Wekker (2001) has indicated that although the different ethnic groups in Suriname operate under different kinship and sexual arrangements, the over-

35 Interview, 10.12.2020.
36 Ibid.
37 Interview, 10.12.2020.
38 Interview, 10.12.2020.

riding practice in each group is that men have more sexual freedom than women. An important sign of intergenerational change and progress is that, in recent years, more and more Hindustani girls are expressing their choice and marrying outside the community in an attempt to escape the oppressive familial and communal structure.[39]

This scenario does not, however, appear to be irreversible. Popular media discourses on women in Indian families have emerged over the years as a source of social power and dignity for the ostensibly subjugated Hindustani women. One of the reasons for the immense popularity of Indian television serials and soap operas, for example, remains the 'lessons' on familial control that they derive from them. A large proportion of popular television content produced in India focuses on familial structures of power. 'Women in my in-law's family would be glued to Hindi-language serials produced in India, most of them middle-aged. Some of what they viewed was even put to practice in their own families. They somehow felt empowered to practice what they imbibed from these serials,' related the interlocutor, a female professional based in Den Haag.[40]

During the early phase of community formation in Den Haag, many Hindustani families were strapped for cash and commodities and lived a difficult life. In a number of them, the women assumed a leadership role in the family. 'My father had a second stroke after he came to the Netherlands and could never work. It fell on my mother's shoulders to keep us fed and clothed. With the money we received from the Dutch government, she tried to make ends meet,' said Nalini, adding: 'We never had any extra money for clothes or other luxuries. Our life was not one of luxury; we often wore hand-me-downs. But we had a home and food on the table so never realised how poor we were.' She further recalls her older siblings supporting the family on a regular basis.[41]

Primarily, the reason such television content resonated so deeply with the diasporic women was the lack of any direct female reference points in history. Through the strong—often other-worldly—female characters that they were exposed to on TV, many Hindustani women in the Netherlands found their 'sheroes'! These characters reverberated with the women on an unparalleled scale as they started to engage in familial place-making. Not only was the process given an impetus through television viewing, the subliminal project of homemaking began to inhabit another social dimension. Within the home, the Hindustani women started to experience empowerment. A crucial aspect

39 Interview, 10.12.2020.
40 Interview, 10.12.2020.
41 Interview, Nalini, 09.12.2020.

was the intrafamilial control that flowed from the personage of the female characters—here assumed to be suitably married and with children.

Another aspect was the breaking of the traditional bonds and taboos that the women began to indulge in as a result of exposure to strong and often independent on-screen characters. Through these encounters with television content, they experienced not only entertainment but also a resonance with possible forms of enlightenment within a largely patriarchal and traditional social and familial structure. A variety of transformations of homemaking within the community also resulted from the importance of Hindi language cinema and Hindi music in the life of the Hindustani community, an aspect that will be discussed more pointedly in the next section of this paper.

Continuing to interrogate the question of gender as a catalyst for homemaking, the place of sexual minorities or LGBTQ people in the Hindustani community in the Netherlands is highly contested. Even though Suriname remains one of the sites of the historical practice of '*het matiespelen*', which refers to sexual relationships between women (and between men), it has been confined to the Afro-Surinamese community (Wekker, 2001). The prevalence of concubinage in the Creole family structure, however, has been noted by Dew (1978), even as it exists to a lesser degree among the Hindustanis. Being gay or lesbian is very often perceived as unacceptable and prejudice against it is rampant. One of the interlocutors of this paper experienced the resoundingly pejorative language that is most often used for gay or trans people. Words such as 'sissy', 'pansy', 'faggot', 'loser' are part of common and everyday usage within the community even as the Netherlands in general remains one of the most sexually progressive societies in the Western world.[42] The result of a Hindustani person 'turning out gay' is blamed on the family and its values. It is here that issues like familial upbringing, morality and tradition are invoked. 'A common refrain would be to accuse the family for not raising their children right. "How did you raise your child?" or "How did s/he become that?", Hindustani parents (with gay or lesbian children) are routinely asked,' said a respondent.[43] As a result, fundamentally oppressive family structures have often prevented non-binary, non-normative individuals from 'coming out'.[44]

The folkloric tradition of *launda naach*—or *launda ki naach* as it is popularly known among the Hindustanis in the Netherlands—is central to examining the ambiguous position the community is known to display towards sexual minorities in its midst. A risqué and sexualised form of the more famous *nautanki*,

42 The Netherlands legalised gay marriage in April 2001.

43 Interview conducted on 12 December 2020.

44 Interview, 10.12.2020.

launda naach is prominent in rural parts of the Indo-Gangetic plains, particularly in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. According to Saransh Sugandh, an urban Indian *launda naach* performer attempting to revive the dying art in India, the *nachaniya*, or the main performer, is almost always a young adolescent male belonging to a lower-caste group who entertains audiences with his erotic dance.[45] The audience obviously consists of upper-caste males who are partaking in this process of performative humiliation. The *launda naach* is usually performed during weddings—as a variation of the bachelor's party that precedes the main wedding rituals. The preponderance of this folkloric tradition among the Dutch Hindustanis is echoed in its centrality to the cultural ethos of Hindustani diasporas in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The caste status of the performer remains unknown to the audience because of the ostensible banishment of the varna system and its modern variants. Primarily, then, the diasporic engagement with a folk tradition with deeply caste- and gender-specific connotations in its place of origin, takes place in an inclusive cultural and temporal space that denies centrality to aspects such as the caste identity of the performer.

5 Culture and Homemaking

5.1 *Cinema and Music as Cultural Sub-Texts of Homemaking*

The cultural connection with both India and Suriname is maintained by the Dutch Hindustanis by consuming Hindi and Bhojpuri music (through Hindustani Radio) and films (Hindi cinema or Bollywood cinema), and is a significant influence through their homemaking journey. 'The first time my mother's *dadi* (grandmother) watched a Hindi film, she started to cry. She saw her "homeland" in the film and couldn't stop her tears,' recounted one of the key interlocutors for this paper, a young political activist from Den Haag.[46] She added, 'we all wanted to look like Bollywood stars. They became a huge fashion influence for us. In fact, a lot of Hindustani women started wearing *salwar kameez* due to the popularity of Hindi films in the community.'[47] Her statement points to the emotional and nostalgic catharsis—besides the sartorial influence—that the community experienced while watching Hindi films.

'One of our neighbours brought home a VCR (video cassette recorder) in the 1980s. And everyone living on the street was invited to watch movies at his

45 Interview, 14.01.2021.
46 Interview, 12.12.2020.
47 Interview, 23.12.2020.

place. We gladly accepted the offer … some of us would crouch under the table,' reminisced Nalini, describing the formative stages of communal homemaking for the Den Haag Hindustanis.[48] Communal viewing of Hindi movies led to the creation of microcosmic communities in the living room of individuals—the films themselves emerged as a catalyst for homemaking. 'I remember Paul Krugerlaan being dotted with several videotheeks (video rental shops). Hindustani families like ours would frequently visit—these were great sites of community formation or homemaking', the young political activist told me.[49] At first, Hindi movies arrived in Suriname through migrants arriving from England or post-colonies such as Trinidad. The influx of Hindustanis to the Netherlands meant the rapid growth of a market for these cultural products from India. It became a tradition for Hindustani families to watch Hindi movies together.

Besides films, Hindi film music emerged as another prominent cultural link with India and then with Suriname, as the diaspora developed in the Netherlands. Hindustani radio stations established in Paramaribo in Suriname played a major part in the process of homemaking. The task was a difficult one since the community was initially dispersed, apart from those who came together in cities like Den Haag. The radio stations first started in Suriname after urbanisation, when Hindustanis migrated to Paramaribo for better employment opportunities. The Afro-Surinamese people who formed the majority population in the cities had their own radio stations and musical traditions; they normally practised and listened to black African music, jazz and soul and other American musical forms. Taking a cue from their Afro-Surinamese neighbours, the Hindustanis started a radio station that broadcast Hindi film music every Sunday afternoon until the evening.[50]

Gradually, the Sunday radio broadcast music menu started including *Baithak Gaana* programmes. As these grew in popularity, exclusive *Baithak Gaana* performances began to be recorded, establishing the foundation for the development of the *gaana* industry, which now employs or invites performers and artists. Some of the later artists started teaming up with Indo-Trinidadian performers who held Suriname in high esteem because the Hindustanis there were perceived as preserving the culture of their ancestors. As a result, the Hindustani-Bhojpuri-Sarnami musical culture developed a transnational nature.

Having arrived in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 80s, where the Dutch radio culture was strong, the community was faced with the dilemma of eking

48 Interview, Nalini, 09.12. 2020.

49 Interview, 23.12.2020.

50 Interview, 23.12.2020.

out a niche for their forms of music. Hindustani music had to be moved to the Netherlands as well! Buoyed by the establishment of the radio stations, Hindustanis replicated the radio *farmaish* (request) culture, which remained a popular practice with Indian radio listeners until the advent of web-based platforms like YouTube and other music-centred apps. 'We would routinely make a *farmaish* on our friends' or relatives' birthdays or ask for romantic Hindi film songs to be played. When people moved from one province or city to the other, they would ask for "goodbye" or sad songs', recounted one of the key interlocutors of this paper.[51] The role of radio stations extended to essential social occasions such as weddings. The station would broadcast the *farmaish* of the '*byah* families' (the families involved in the festivities). Information about deaths and births was also relayed over radio. Thus, an entire culture of music and celebration developed around Hindustani radio giving impetus to the process of homemaking for the community. Radio Geetanjali and Radio Sangeet Mala were two of the first Hindustani radio stations in the Netherlands.[52] Today, stations like Radio Amore, Radio Ujala, Radio Sangam and Radio Fagun are popular among the community.

The preeminence of music in the social and community formation of the Hindustanis could be assumed from the manner in which the Hindi film song and the traditional folk form of the *Baithak Gaana* merged to lend a unique musical flavour to the early path towards homemaking. In fact, this author argues that Hindi films and film music, together with the regional influence of folk cultural forms such as *Baithak Gaana*, provided the much-needed cultural bulwark to a community that was in need of regeneration after migrating a second time. Community-building was perceived to be harder in the Netherlands than it was in Suriname where Hindustanis usually lived with other people from their own '*des*' (homeland).[53] In the Netherlands, on the other hand, settlement patterns were more dispersed once cities like Den Haag and Rotterdam became saturated with migrants.[54] The critical emotional and cultural connections between the dispersed Hindustanis were primarily through radio broadcasts of songs. Old Hindi film songs of the 1940s and 1950s became the biggest *Baithak Gaana* hits.[55] This was a period of immense cultural renewal

51 Interview, 23.12.2020.

52 Information from interview conducted in December 2020.

53 Interview, 23.12.2020.

54 When families arrived in the Netherlands, they were put in camps across the country. As a result, families were torn apart.

55 Please visit https://www.discogs.com/search/?style_exact=Hindustani&limit=250&country_exact=Netherlands for several examples.

for the Hindustanis. The traditional *Baithak Gaana* repertoire comprised of Hindu mythological songs and songs about farmlands left back in India, as well as songs of leaving (*bidaai* songs)—especially significant for the immigrants. The inclusion of Hindi film songs indicated a noteworthy departure from the normative form.

Songs of pathos and pain remained popular even outside the sphere of the *Baithak Gaana* and ruled the airwaves on radio stations that continued to broadcast in Sarnami Hindi. One of the most popular songs of yesteryear remains '*Babul ki duayein leti ja*' (Take with you the wishes of your natal home) by Mohammad Rafi; later Hindi film numbers, like '*Didi tera dewar deewana*' (Sister, your brother-in-law is crazy) and '*Mehndi laga ke rakhna*' (Keep the henna on your palms)[56] emerged as community favourites during weddings and related ceremonies.[57] Affirmation of familial relationships is discernible in the successful trajectory of film songs among the Hindustanis, as reaffirmed by one of the key interlocutors of this paper who attributed this to the universal and ubiquitous nature of film songs—there is something for everyone in them—which makes them applicable to everyday life situations, landmarks and emotions like no other musical form.[58] She added, 'For instance, "Salaam Namaste" is a radio programme that is broadcast every evening where people from Netherlands and Suriname can call each other—friends or family—and the songs that accompany each call expresses the sentiment.' Having said that, she lamented that Hindustani Radio was not innovating and as a result was losing ground with the younger Indo-Surinamese in the Netherlands. Younger Hindustanis preferred new urban forms of music that connected them to the larger multicultural milieu. While the young interlocutor felt connected to the community through Hindi film and traditional folk music broadcast over the Hindustani radio stations, she observed that the 'tradition' might collapse and die an untimely death if not preserved.[59]

On the other hand, the *Baithak Gaana*—a symbol of Hindustani identity—is emerging as a preferred cultural genre for a significant number of younger Hindustanis in the Netherlands. The apathy of the youth who turned the genre into a sub-culture in the 1980s has transformed considerably as young people now think it is 'cool' to be associated with *Baithak Gaana* and its performance.[60] Hindustani youth generally become accustomed to *Baithak Gaana*

56 Translations of the Hindi song titles are by the author.
57 Interview, 23.12.2020.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.

in their family environment. 'Some people look down upon their culture and think the white people will think of us as backward', related a crucial interlocutor of this paper.[61] But the unique sounds of the musical form—completely unfamiliar to the Western ear—have managed to create a niche in the upwardly mobile Hindustani community in the Netherlands, lending it credence as one of the key aspects of diasporic homemaking. It did not happen without the introduction of new and innovative sounds in the genre, as *'Baithak Gaana* music has become quite fast'.[62] The accompanying dancing has also picked up speed which accommodates elements of contemporary dance forms and methods that are in fashion.

5.2 *Language as an Impetus to Homemaking*

While the elite Hindustanis preferred Dutch over Sarnami Hindi, some diasporic families attempted to preserve the language through either an adherence to religious practice or communal and familial viewing of films and engaging in musical performance. The present generation of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora in the Netherlands prefer to use Sarnami Hindi language when they 'are emotional or sharing a family secret'. Siela—one of the main interlocutors—contended that Hindustani people don't like to speak Sarnami Hindi in public spaces primarily because they fear being stereotyped by the majority Dutch people as a 'maladjusted minority'.[63]

A neat categorisation developed in the early years of community formation in the Netherlands. Those who remained illiterate or dropped out of school continued to speak Sarnami Hindi/Bhojpuri while those who were educated preferred to speak, read and write in Dutch. 'The refrain thus was—if you belong to the elite, you better speak Dutch and not Sarnami Hindi', explained Siela. Her fifty-eight-year-old Hindustani friend exemplified this norm. Although born in Suriname, she never learnt the language because her educated parents did not encourage it.[64] Raised in a predominantly white community, she now feels culturally uprooted and looks for ways to be in touch with the culture and traditions of her community. In contrast, Siela and her siblings were raised within the folds of Hindustani culture. 'Growing up in the Netherlands, we were constantly under the white Dutch gaze which categorised our language outside the boundaries of civility', she expounded. Not speaking flawless Dutch prevented them from becoming part of the cultural and social sphere;

61 Interview, 23.12.2020.
62 Interview with interlocutor in December 2020.
63 Interview, Siela, 23.12.2020.
64 Interview, 23.12.2020.

in fact, not speaking any European (Germanic or Latin) language satisfactorily was perceived as a disqualification from attaining the required levels of assimilation.[65] In view of the virulence and apathy that was in evidence towards the language, many Hindustanis are surprised that Sarnami Hindi has survived among the community in the Netherlands.

Remarkably then, the language has tended to survive among working-class Hindustanis, while the upper-class elite have unequivocally adopted Dutch as their lingua franca and a marker of upward social mobility in a largely white Dutch environment. 'I was surprised one day when my teenaged son expressed his disappointment at not knowing Hindi', exclaimed Siela.[66] It revealed the desire of Dutch Hindustani youth to get back in touch with their roots—much like the transformation of *Baithak Gaana* as a faster, groovier form of music. Young Nishan[67] and his friend Jaden[68] collaborated on a project funded by Sarnami House—a community institution in Den Haag. One of the tasks included interviewing older Hindustanis[69] in the city, which resulted in a short film screened in movie theatres. Incredibly, both the making of the film as well as their common Hindustani heritage oriented the boys further towards their roots and brought them closer together as friends. Siela also talks fondly about her younger son who surprised her by downloading a Hindi language-learning app on his phone and has been making an effort to follow the lessons as much as he can.[70] Interestingly, the youngsters are quite adept at singing devotional songs and bhajans and reciting mantras. 'They don't really understand much of what they are singing or reciting but they participate with enthusiasm', she said, adding that the youth were seldom embarrassed or ashamed to express their religious or linguistic identity in public spaces, which points to the ambivalence that pervades their identity as an ethnic minority in Europe. The Hindustani youth, thus, appear to be reimagining their place as a diaspora in the Dutch-European milieu by embracing their identity as a community of colour with specific and distinct everyday ritual and religious practices, cultural forms and genres, establishing transnational links with the broader Indian-

65 Interview, Siela, 23.12.2020.

66 Interview, Siela, 23.12.2020.

67 Nishan's father is half Japanese and half Creole while his mother (Siela) is Hindustani.

68 Jaden comes from Hindustani heritage.

69 Specific details about the age group were not available with the young filmmakers but the respondents in general could be categorised as senior citizens. The number of those interviewed also could not be discerned. The overall result of the short film, however, is significant as it elicited an emotional response among the viewers of the film, exemplifying the implication of the film for the Hindustani diaspora in the Netherlands.

70 Interview, Siela, 23.12.2020

origin diaspora. This attitude, unlike the anxieties of the previous generations trying to fit into the existing Western mould, provides impetus to contemporary, ongoing processes of homemaking.

6 Conclusions

The paper has—based on primary material collected through long-form conversational interviews—strived to outline the process towards homemaking by the ethnic minority diaspora group, the Hindustanis in the Netherlands. As a result, it delineates four key factors that have contributed to bringing the 'homing' desire of the Hindustani diaspora to fruition: urban placemaking in the initial and continuing phase of settlement; ritual and religious practice in the new home; familial and social empowerment of Hindustani women through the consumption of culture; and the reimagination of cultural forms like music and language by the Hindustani youth. While the early settlement of the community was facilitated by the policies of the Dutch state, subsequent attempts at placemaking have included struggles for spaces of worship (Swamy, 2016) and the creation of urban spaces for festivities and community practices. The process has also included breaking communal and gender stereotypes—exemplified by Siela, a trained and certified Hindu priestess. Wearing the *sindoor* regularly kept her grounded and rooted—forming a link between her present diasporic self and her origins (Interview, 23.12.2020).

Homemaking has also sought to be achieved through a delicate yet discernible transformation of intrafamilial power equations, changing irrevocably the place of women in the Hindustani community. Even though the paper does not focus much on the manner in which minority gender identities within the community have negotiated their in-group space and within the larger liberal Dutch environment, it must be mentioned as one of the most enlightening subliminal processes at play towards reimagining diasporic identity. For the gay or transgender Hindustanis, for instance, performing the *launda ki naach* as a diasporic cultural 'coming of age' function has emerged as a central element in reclaiming minority gender identities within a generally conservative social milieu. On a similar trajectory, through the reinvigoration of musical forms like the *Baithak Gaana*, the *launda ki naach* performance and the viewing of Hindi films as a family (also communal) tradition, the colonial, twice-migrant diaspora has established itself as part of a transnational community—having roots in the labour or indentured diaspora—with strands in other post-colonies in the Caribbean as well as the South Pacific.

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