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## “Only so that my daughter gets exposure to the culture”: Ethnic leisure practices and intangible cultural heritage in British Indian diasporic families

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Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a concept has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. However, empirical understanding of how ICH migrates, and is transmitted within diasporic communities is sparse. This paper draws upon a qualitative study with middle-class British Indian families living in and around London to unpack the ways in which ICH is enacted, interpreted, and transmitted from across generation through the construction of diasporic leisure spaces. Based on interviews with parents and children and observation of festival sites, it is argued that the leisure–ICH nexus in the diaspora materializes through two interlinked processes: “transmission of ethnic cultural capital” and “place-making.” These processes draw upon and contribute to diasporic social networks. In exploring these intersections, the paper further draws attention to how the internal differentiations within diasporic communities deflect the (re)production of diasporic leisure and ICH in the context of contemporary urban multi-culture in London.

**Keywords:** intangible cultural heritage; Indian diaspora; children’s leisure; family leisure; leisure and ethnicity

Le patrimoine culturel immatériel (PCI) en tant que concept a reçu une attention scientifique considérable ces dernières années. Cependant, la compréhension empirique sur la manière dont le PCI transmet au sein des communautés diasporiques est rare. Cet article s’appuie sur une étude qualitative à menée auprès de familles indiennes britanniques de la classe moyenne vivant à Londres et dans sa banlieue. Il présente l’analyse de la mise en œuvre, de l’interprétation et de la transmission du PCI de génération en génération au travers de la construction d’espaces de loisirs diasporiques. Sur la base d’entretiens menés auprès de parents et de leurs enfants, de même que de l’observation de sites de festival, il semble que le lien loisirs-PCI dans la diaspora se matérialise par le biais de deux processus interconnectés : « la transmission du capital culturel ethnique » et « la création de lieux ».

**Mots clés :** patrimoine culturel immatériel; diaspora indienne; loisirs des enfants; loisirs en famille; loisirs et ethnicité

### Introduction

In recent years, the notion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – instituted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – has drawn

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immense attention from international organizations, social researchers, and heritage scholars among others. This emergent ICH scholarship has, inter alia, raised questions about the tangible/intangible dichotomy that underpins ICH (Baillie & Chippindale, 2006; Munjeri, 2004), commented on the politics behind UNESCO's efforts at producing representative lists of ICH (Hafstein, 2009), and reflected on how the institutionalization of ICH by UNESCO has redefined our understanding of heritage itself (Bortolotto, 2007; Hafstein, 2015). This paper will adopt the conceptual framework of ICH and, using leisure practices as the point of entry, raise a different set of questions about ICH vis-à-vis migrant and diasporic communities in the global north. Indeed, the literature examining ICH in migratory contexts is rather thin on the ground (Amescua, 2013; Cheung, 2013; Naguib, 2013; Nettleford, 2004), and its intersection with leisure practices is particularly under-explored. Thus, this paper will interrogate the overlap between leisure practices and the manner in which ICH is interpreted, circulated, and transmitted within these communities. Put differently, it asks how specific forms of leisure play a role in the enactment and nurturing of ICH among ethnic minority communities and what their implications are for understanding cultural diversity and the nature of ICH. Since ICH is embodied by people, it invariably implicates spaces and places, identities and belonging, social relationships and power hierarchies, all of which assume distinctive connotations in diasporic contexts. In what follows, these issues will be pursued through a qualitative study of Indian diasporic families in contemporary Britain to demonstrate the role of leisure activities in the perception, construction, circulation, and transmission of ICH. First, the key debates around ICH will be outlined and existing studies on ICH and Indian diasporic families reviewed. Then, the research project with British Indian families will be introduced which focused on the identity processes through which ICH and leisure implicate each other in these contexts.

ICH as defined by the UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (henceforth 2003 Convention) stands for "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage." (p.2) In this expansive view, UNESCO built upon its earlier expertise in the preservation of "folklore" to emphasize the need for greater mutual respect for and safeguarding of ICH through international cooperation. ICH, the 2003 Convention further points out, is continually recreated and reimaged by individuals and groups in response to their social milieu, thus producing in its creators and bearers a sense of collective identity and belonging. Following its inception into academic discourses, ICH has received a diversity of critical treatments in the hands of social researchers. Nevertheless, most scholars concur that with ICH the focus has shifted away from a Western museological preoccupation that treats cultural expressions as *objects* to seeing them as dynamic *processes* (Bortolotto, 2007). This move away from the archival documentation paradigm that celebrated the relatively static nature of cultural products as relics of the past, catapulted scholars into the realm of living heritage and that of human activity which underpins and facilitates cultural production.

This paper will deploy the conceptual frame of ICH more generally which applies to a wide range of social groups and will thus not be restricted to the narrow "representative list" of ICH published annually by UNESCO. Among the five "domains" of ICH identified by UNESCO (2003), this paper is more specifically concerned with the domains of "performing arts" and "social practices, rituals and festive events."

In treating ICH as a more encompassing analytical field, it is important to recognize that nonphysical cultural heritage assumes greater urgency in the case of marginalized and racialized groups in the global north. Moreover, the vitality of these nonphysical cultural expressions is said to be threatened by globalization, mass cultural industries, and migration of people (Stefano *et al.*, 2012). Thus, ICH opens up possibilities for a more holistic approach to heritage that challenges the conventional understanding of it – prevalent since the nineteenth century – which has been built upon discourses of national boundaries, authenticity, and the documentary importance of heritage-as-objects (Naguib, 2013). Relatedly, constructions of transnational diasporas have inverted the presumed relationship between community, culture, and place that anthropology has historically taken for granted (Helmreich, 1992), thus necessitating a more networked understanding of social worlds. Therefore, examining the intersection of leisure and ICH from the vantage point of transnational diasporic communities is particularly productive, as this article will demonstrate with reference to the Indian diaspora in the UK.

### ***Diaspora and culture heritage***

The concept of “diaspora” has achieved academic prominence relatively recently as a way of thinking about and understanding movement, subjectivity, and belonging that transcend national borders. The term “diaspora” historically signified the displacement and dispersal of Greeks and Jews from their respective homelands; it has, however, since been repurposed and broadened as “metaphoric designations” (Safran, 1991, p. 83) for several categories of migrant population in today’s world. Since diasporic lives connect places, cultures, and networks across multiple geographies, diaspora is a useful lens for interrogating transnational formations and the changing racial and ethnic composition of contemporary societies. In using diaspora as a framework, scholars have alerted us to the need to attend to the historical conditions of migration and that of settlement (Brah, 1996) and in the process unpack the ways in which the diaspora simultaneously articulates the “homeland” – both real and imagined – whilst also actively shaping the economic, cultural, and political landscapes of their countries of settlement (Thobani, 2019). Here, the notion of homeland cannot be readily translated into coordinates of fixed origin. Instead, as Miller (2002) has shown, homelands are utopian spaces often brought to life in the diaspora through texts, media images, and lore which open an imaginative space wherein received memories play out and through which notions of place-based identities are negotiated by diasporans. These arguments further direct our attention to the diasporic present and indeed to “diaspora spaces” (Brah, 1996) where reified conceptions of borders and cultural identities are contested and remade. Indeed, as Hall (1990) pointed out, cultural identities in the diaspora have histories, and they therefore undergo constant transformation in the place of settlement. Hence, understanding their historical roots and routes must go hand in hand with an appreciation of how these cultural identities are refashioned and constructed in the present, from resources that connect multiple places and histories, and how they play out within the internal fissures – that of class, gender, generation, and others – of these diasporic formations. In other words, diaspora constitutes a field of interaction which is internally differentiated and externally porous (Alexander, 2011).

It has already been established – through the earlier discussion of the 2003 Convention and its critiques – that ICH implicates cultural identities and subjectivities;

the significance of ICH cannot be fully understood without teasing out its deep-seated links with questions of identity. This article takes up the case of the Indian diaspora in the UK to examine the role of leisure practices in fostering those links between ICH and diasporic cultural identities. However, while talking about a diasporic community, the pitfalls inherent in such a usage must be acknowledged. This is because the ambivalence of the diaspora concept can be exploited to reify racial and ethnic differences, erase internal structural inequalities, and mount reactionary nationalist projects, while at the same time it can be used as a springboard to challenge, unsettle, or subvert those very tendencies (Alexander, 2011). Thus, in framing the debate about Indian diaspora and ICH, this article will critically engage with this ambivalence.

Histories of migration – to, from, and within India – have shaped the unique diversity of cultural formations that can be observed in India today (Tumbe, 2018). Consequently, the global Indian diaspora, which now stands at roughly 30 million (Overseas Indian Affairs, 2018), reflects these complexities of cultural identities and practices. This calls for a networked understanding of transnational cultural flows that underpin ICH in the diaspora. Scholars of modern Indian diaspora (Bhat, 1998; Jain, 2004) often draw a distinction between the waves of out-migration from India that took place during the colonial era and those that happened from the mid-twentieth century onwards after India's independence. This article will primarily focus on such post-colonial Indian diasporic formations in the contemporary UK. The Indian diaspora in the UK today is a complex mix of people with migration histories linked to different regional, linguistic, and religious groups in India. This project engaged with UK-based Indian diasporic families with divergent subnational and linguistic affiliations in India such as Punjabis, Gujaratis, Kannadigas, Tamils, and Bengalis and who identify as Hindu, Sikh, or Jain. The intention here is not to provide a comprehensive picture of the Indian diaspora in the UK but to reveal how ICH linked to these subnational, linguistic, or religious traditions in India is channeled and cultivated in the diaspora through leisure practices. While these internal differences matter in terms of what is considered to be ICH in these families, there is also a shared commitment to a transnational pan-Indian identity among these diasporans and a common interest in keeping their traditions alive – often in modified forms – and passing them on to the next generation. Reassessing the extant empirical scholarship on the global Indian diaspora can help unpick the threads that connect diasporic leisure practices to ICH and cultural identities. Although none of these studies actually deploys the framework of leisure or ICH explicitly, and most of them are quite dated, in what follows their empirical findings will be revisited through these prisms and the thematic patterns and gaps in existing research will be identified.

### ***ICH and leisure in the Indian diaspora***

Scholars of Indian diaspora have mostly attended to Indian material cultural products – such as fashion, films, books, music, food, and other such items – which provide diasporic Indians with tools for sculpting their ethnic identity (Purkayastha, 2005). Others, however, report largely incidental findings about nonmaterial cultural expressions and their entanglement with leisure time-spaces. These studies, in various ways, show that “spaces for leisure” (Wearing, 1998) are created by diasporans both in public and private to channel their intangible heritage – particularly those involving performing arts, ethnic festivals, rituals, and cultural practices – as a way of claiming greater

recognition from the mainstream society, building community and reinforcing ethnic pride.

Bhattacharya's (2008) study in New York City found that Indian diasporans reinforced their ethnic pride and forged group solidarity by participating in community-based ethnic festivals including Dussehra and Diwali, which are celebrated across India by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and others. Her participants laid emphasis on the ethnic atmosphere created by Indian food, clothes, music performances, and conversations which facilitated the formation and nurturance of social networks within the diaspora. These ethnic festivals and performances, Bhattacharya (2008) pointed out, made many participants feel as if a part of their homeland had been recreated in the USA, and they also buffered the social isolation and marginalization that many diasporic Indians faced especially in a post-9/11 America, which saw public hostility against South Asian men increase manifold. Documenting similar ethnic leisure activities and festivals amongst mostly northern Indian diasporic communities in Queens, New York, Khandelwal (2002) posited that these cultural expressions serve multiple functions. Besides enabling the Indian diaspora to preserve their cultural heritage, these events and practices play a crucial role in educating the mainstream American society as well as the younger US-born generation of Indian diasporans about Indian cultural traditions and heritage. In a similar vein, Kim (2014) has shown how in the post-9/11 and 7/7 UK, South Asian young people in London resisted forms of racism by carving diasporic music scenes in the city that combined Punjabi bhangra with Bollywood and hip hop. These alternative leisure spaces were contiguous with the lived multi-culture<sup>1</sup> embodied by these diasporic youth, and through these music scenes they claimed a "space for Asians and by Asians who rejected the White hegemonic order" of contemporary Britain (Kim, 2014, p. 124).

Apart from performing arts and festivals, social-religious practices and rituals within families also feature in extant studies on the Indian diaspora. Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2003) documented the ways in which Hindu Indians from different subnational/linguistic backgrounds living in Southern California created sacred spaces within the home by designating an altar area and offering prayers to the resident deities, alongside ritual practices involving food offerings, flowers, lamps, incense sticks, and devotional music. Since Hinduism – unlike Abrahamic religions – does not have mandated times and days for collective worship, visits to temples are left to individual discretion, which further reinforces the importance of private family-based religious celebrations engineered within the domestic realm. In Britain, Gell's (1994) study found that Punjabi Sikhs enacted their relationship to the British state and mainstream society by innovating a two-stage ceremonialization of marriage rituals: the first, a secular rite of legal marriage at the Registry Office followed a few weeks or even months later by an ostensibly religious ceremony loaded with ritual practices in a Gurudwara (Sikh temple) or private dwelling. This example shows how ritual practices and ceremonies – as embodied ICH – are remodeled in the diaspora, conveying a sense of both continuity and change. Based on a similar study of Punjabi marriage practices in the UK, Mand (2003) argues that diasporic families garner "status" at a wedding by enacting rituals which are deemed "correct" and "ideal" within the community. These rituals, however, are gendered, and they map onto the different positions men and women occupy within families.

It must be stressed that the Indian diaspora, its leisure spaces, and its ICH are not monolithic but are instead internally fractured along the lines of social class, religion, gender, sexuality, and caste. There are also palpable tensions at play between a pan-

Indian identity and subnational/regional affiliations in the Indian diaspora. Based on a study in New York, Khandelwal (2002) pointed out how a cultural divide exists between upper- and middle-class Indians in Manhattan and their less well-off counterparts in Queens. The former looked down upon the Indian communities in Queens and instead attended Indian cultural activities held in Manhattan's Lincoln Center and university campuses. Others have drawn attention to caste-based discriminations especially within Hindu and Sikh diasporic leisure spaces in the UK and elsewhere by documenting how lower castes or Dalits feel excluded from these diasporic social spaces (Kumar, 2009). Although it is outside the remit of this paper to offer a detailed account of the internal fissures within the diaspora, a conceptual understanding of these hierarchies is important to put diasporic ICH and leisure into perspective.

The extant literature as shown in the discussion above is dated, and it does not engage in any meaningful way with children's leisure or parent-child leisure in the context of ICH. Advancing such a perspective on the loci at which leisure practices and ICH intersect in the diaspora can open new avenues for understanding ICH transmission and its implications for diasporic leisure lives.

### **The study: Aims and methods**

This article draws on a qualitative study with Indian diasporic families living in and around London. The data was collected between 2016 and 2018, primarily through one-to-one narrative interviews with 18 parents and 12 children in family homes alongside some observational data gathered from visits to Indian festivals sites including Diwali<sup>2</sup> and Durga Puja,<sup>3</sup> and places of worship such as Hindu temples and Sikh Gurudwaras in Greater London. The data reported here was part of a wider study whose aim was to explore the everyday leisure experiences of British Indian children and their parents and thereby interrogate the significance of leisure to the social construction of childhoods and parenthoods within these diasporic families. Given its remit, the study used children's leisure practices – including cross-generational family leisure activities – as a point of entry to understand how cultural identities played out within parenting cultures and children's everyday geographies in these families. The 10 families that participated in the study included Hindu Punjabis (2 families), Sikh Punjabis (1 family), Hindu Gujaratis (1 family), Jain Marwaris (1 family), Jain Gujaratis (1 family), Hindu Tamils (1 family), Hindu Kannadigas (1 family), Hindu Keralites (1 family), and Hindu Bengalis (1 family). Although not representative of the demographic makeup of the British Indian diaspora, these 10 families reflect the internal diversity of the Indian diaspora in terms of subnational, linguistic, and religious identities. The specificities as well as the overlap between these groups vis-à-vis ICH will be accounted for in the ensuing analysis of the data.

The Indian diaspora constitutes 2.5% of the current population of England and Wales as per the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2018), and it is one of the biggest ethnic minority groups in the country. British Indians have performed consistently well on key indicators such as educational attainment, employment, and housing. Irrespective of these socio-economic success stories, British Indians continue to be racialized within mainstream discourses. As Ratna (2020, p. 160) pointed out, popular discourses in the UK simultaneously position British Indians “as model minority citizens *and* disloyal, self-segregating and potentially terrorist members of the nation.” Given this backdrop, the study concentrated on professional middle-class British Indian parents and their



children between the ages of 8 and 12. Firstly, despite a sizable presence of black and ethnic minority middle-class families, academic scholarship on middle-class parenting cultures in the UK has usually assumed a race-blind approach and only captured the views of white middle classes (Rollock *et al.*, 2015). Thus, looking into British Indian middle-class families offered an opportunity to intervene in the debate around the intersection of race and class in shaping parenting strategies. All the parents in the study had university degrees and were homeowners. With the exception of four housewives, the parents were all working as high-ranking professionals in sectors such as medicine, banking, IT, software, and education. Secondly, we know from existing studies that in middle childhood (8–12 years) children’s organized leisure activities take off in a significant way, and also their participation in parent–child family leisure is common (Shaw *et al.*, 2008). Thirdly, as indicated above, whilst some studies have over the years looked into aspects of cultural heritage and that of leisure in isolation, there is a dearth of in-depth understanding of how leisure and ICH overlap within the lived geographies of British Indian families. Taken together, the focus on children’s leisure and parent–child relations opened a new window into our understanding of the place of leisure in diasporic ICH which sets this study apart from previous works.

Choosing London and its environs as the locale for the study was significant too since this migrant city, which was once the center of the British Empire, presently embodies an urban multi-culture characterized by “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2007). Considering the social diversity of London and its extended suburban belt also calls attention to the “paradoxical co-existence of racism and urban multi-culture” (Back & Sinha, 2016, p. 518). Recognizing people’s “thrown-togetherness” (Massey, 2005, p. 181) in London’s urban multi-culture must be accompanied by an understanding of the historically constituted cultural hierarchies and social inequalities within which Londoners’ everyday encounters with difference take place. The notion of multi-culture is used here to denote a social condition wherein multiple cultures and ethnic groups inhabit a social space which triggers various forms of interaction and mutual exchange. Multiculturalism, then, is one of the many responses to and ways of thinking about the social reality of multi-culture. Furthermore, researching cultural expressions of ethnic minorities demands a reflexivity about the politics of such knowledge production since their cultural practices have historically been “imbued with an exoticized, othered status in the West” – forged through the orientalist tradition of Western knowledge/power (Sharma *et al.*, 1996, p. 2). These questions are central to this project about the place of leisure practices in diasporic cultural expressions, and, as indicated before, this article will consider the way subnational, linguistic, and religious affiliations of Indian diasporans shape their subjective understandings of cultural heritage and practices.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with each parent and their children (aged 8 to 12) in their family homes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed verbatim. Alongside the interview transcripts, there was observation data from the various Indian festivals and community spaces in London that were visited for this research project. The transcripts and the observation data were coded and themes developed, which were further distilled through the constant comparative method. The themes were analyzed by considering the context of urban multi-culture in London, the dynamics of transnationalism and the internal fissures within the diaspora to make sense of the leisure practices and the participants’ ways of “doing” ICH. Key themes developed from interview and observation data indicate that the leisure–ICH overlap in these families is shot through with two



interconnected processes: “transmission of ethnic cultural capital” and “place-making,” which will now be expanded upon in turn.

### *Transmission of ethnic cultural capital*

The Indian diasporic parents who took part in the study expressed a latent anxiety about the need to ensure that their children grow up with an appreciation for their Indian heritage and develop a positive ethnic identity. Although previous scholars studying Indian diaspora (Bhatt, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 2011) have hinted at these parental concerns around cultural transmission, they have not unpacked the manner in which Indian diasporic parents activate particular strategies and nonphysical heritage to allay these concerns and effect inter-generational cultural reproduction. Across participating families, parents mobilized children’s leisure spaces to channel those cultural heritages that they deemed to be an integral part of their transnational Indian identity, and which are often rooted in their specific regional, linguistic, or religious affiliations in India. These leisure spaces included children’s organized activities as well as cross-generational family leisure.

Indian performing arts play a key role in these families as a vehicle for “doing” their cultural heritage. One of the most prominent instances of this was Bollywood<sup>4</sup> dance and music. Just as Bollywood is popular across northern, western, and eastern India, it has been embraced by diasporans with family histories in these parts of India. While talking about his 11-year-old son Suraj’s leisure schedule, Manoj, who is an IT program manager at a multinational bank in London, invoked the importance of Bollywood dancing and music in his family. Suraj used to attend Bollywood dancing lessons locally, largely at the behest of his mother, Simi – an HR professional in London’s financial district – who harbors immense interest in Bollywood music, as Manoj puts it:

My wife [Simi] is very much into her Bollywood and her movies and music and she wanted them [my three children] to have some sort of cultural background in terms of the music. (Manoj)

For Manoj and Simi, who are Hindu Punjabis, it was Hindi popular music that made Bollywood dancing an especially meaningful medium for Suraj to appreciate his “cultural background” and develop ethnic pride. And Suraj is not alone. The large majority of children in the Indian families that took part in this study attended some form of Indian music and dance lesson, which more often than not involved Bollywood because there are more opportunities to learn Bollywood dancing in London than other Indian dance forms. In the extract below, eight-year-old Aashka, who is from a Hindu Gujarati family, talks about her foray into Bollywood dance lessons which was organized by her mother, Swati, who is a senior dentist by profession:

My mum booked me for Bollywood dancing. So, then she really wanted me to dance more than play the piano so then we stopped piano and then started doing Bollywood dancing . . . I enjoy it . . . I also get to learn songs at the Bollywood dance [class] because we dance to all those [Bollywood film] songs because there was more than just one dance. (Aashka)

Like Manoj, Aashka here draws links between Bollywood dance, films, and music, which come together in her dance lessons. Often described as a “unique film-based global dance phenomenon” (Shresthova, 2011, p. 144), live Bollywood dancing refers to dances choreographed to Hindi film songs. It is an inherently hybrid dance genre that

draws upon a plethora of Indian classical and folk-dance forms as well as Western popular dance movements, and which has now spread across India and its diaspora as a visible marker of Indian popular culture primarily through the song-and-dance sequences of popular Hindi films (Khubchandani, 2016; Shresthova, 2011). As Bollywood dance academies have grown in the major cities of the UK, they have made available a popular cultural heritage that middle-class parents such as Manoj, Simi, and Swati can tap into as a means of transmitting a sense of “cultural background” to their UK-born children. It is a popular cultural form that a vast number of Indians share and identify with. Although Manoj and Swati were both born in the UK, their parents came from northern and western India, which in turn linked them to the common pool of Bollywood music and films. Given its hybrid character, Bollywood dancing has immense room for modification and adaptation in the context of the films – where movements are choreographed with narrative needs and changing audience tastes in mind – as well as in its live performances where local contexts and interpretations are accommodated to create an ever-evolving performance genre (Shresthova, 2011). It is evident in the narratives above that Bollywood dancing represents an “enskkilled knowledge” (Naguib, 2013) which can only be acquired through embodied practice and is therefore a non-tangible cultural expression which is seen by many Indian diasporic parents as integral to their shared pan-Indian popular cultural heritage. In effecting these modes of inter-generational cultural transmission, women play a pivotal role as seen in the examples of Simi and Swati: two professional women of Indian heritage who took the initiative to enroll their children into Bollywood dancing to facilitate the development of ethnic cultural capital. By doing so, they resolved their own anxieties about ensuring cultural continuities, and in this sense, they not only bear the responsibility for social reproduction within the household but are also positioned as enablers of inter-generational cultural reproduction. In other words, motherhood in the Indian diaspora is often constructed with reference to women’s role as gatekeepers of (heteronormative) cultural traditions and heritage. Thus, appreciating the role of leisure in the enactment and transmission of ICH in the diaspora calls for an understanding of the gendered labor that makes it possible.

Aside from the pan-Indian appeal of Bollywood, there are also other forms of ICH which relate to subnational or regional affiliations of diasporic communities. For instance, Jagadish and Veena both hail from southern India, more specifically a town in the northern tip of the state of Karnataka. In the interview excerpt below, Jagadish – an IT consultant living on the edge of London – talks about the various religious rituals that he and his family, comprising his wife, Veena, and their two sons, observe:

We have our own mandir and then we do a puja. All of the family as a whole attend Pujas. So that’s all part and parcel of our daily routine, even for our children. (Jagadish)

Jagadish’s family home just outside London has a small mandir (shrine) attached to one part of the living room where they congregate every day to offer prayers. These rituals and religion-based leisure spaces are created every day and amplified during festivals. They are integral to the cultural reproduction mechanism through which Jagadish and Veena seek to transfer ethnic cultural capital to their sons. Alongside daily offerings (pujas) and prayers, on auspicious occasions a set of special rituals are observed and special food is prepared for the gods. Ganesh Chaturthi is one such Hindu festival that they celebrate. The particular caste group that Jagadish’s and Veena’s families belong to has an established tradition of celebrating the Ganesha festival,

which is further reinforced by the fact that they come from a town in Karnataka which borders the state of Maharashtra, where Ganesha Chaturthi (or Ganesha festival) is the biggest public festival of the year. In fact, their marriage was arranged by their families keeping caste endogamy in mind. Jagadish's caste and regional identities shape the particular Ganesha rituals his family follows and the food they prepare during the festivities. Having lived in the UK for decades and now with UK-born children, they celebrate festivals such as Ganesha as a domestic ritual worship instead of a community festival like it is in their hometown in India and turn it into a site for the transference of ethnic cultural capital. Jagadish's narrative further outlines the importance of the intangible cultural practices in bringing diasporic families and communities together.

Taken together, the above-cited instances demonstrate the important role of leisure practices – Bollywood dancing, festivals, and rituals – in the circulation, interpretation, and transmission of intangible heritage within diasporic families. In effect, they illustrate how leisure practices and ICH overlap in diasporic contexts where the former become vehicles for the transmission of ethnic cultural capital. Ethnic cultural capital refers to “a dynamic process of cultural negotiation in which immigrant parents selectively mobilize their cultural heritages and sometimes mix and match it with values and practices in the new country” (Lan, 2018, p. 127). Thus conceptualized, ethnic cultural capital no longer conveys a purported sense of homogeneity within ethnic groups and instead helps us grapple with the complexities of ICH transmission in the diaspora. As we saw, Bollywood dancing responds to local contexts by incorporating Western popular dance movements alongside an already eclectic mix of Indian classical and folk-dance forms. In the case of Jagadish, we witnessed domestication of Indian public festivals and rituals in response to their current diasporic location. His family has also evolved a more flexible approach to the ritual practices by accommodating them within existing daily schedules shaped by paid work, children's school, and other commitments. Thus, leisure spaces are key to the way ICH is activated and transmitted to the younger generation in the diaspora. However, the kinds of practices which are included in these efforts rest on subnational/linguistic/religious affiliations of the families on one hand and the availability of opportunities in their immediate context on the other.

### ***Place-making***

Every year since 2001, London's Trafalgar Square has played host to a day-long public celebration of the Indian festival of Diwali, which is supported by the office of the Mayor of London. The festival – which is observed by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains alike – is celebrated on the public square through a range of embodied cultural practices including live performance of Indian dance and music. Diwali is a religious occasion that marks, or so the Hindu mythology goes, Lord Ram's return to his kingdom after slaying the 10-headed demon Ravana and “rescuing” his wife Sita as depicted in the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana*. The Diwali Day each year is determined by the Hindu lunisolar calendar, and therefore it is different every year – falling either in October or early November. Notwithstanding the exact date of Diwali as per celestial movement, “Diwali on Trafalgar Square” or DOTS is organized on a Sunday within a few weeks of the actual Diwali Day to maximize attendance.

When DOTS was visited on a mid-October Sunday afternoon in 2016 as part of this project, the embodied dimensions of this Indian cultural festival were particularly noticeable in the way sights, sounds, and smells greeted visitors. One end of the square hosted

a temporary stage while the other three sides were flanked by rows of makeshift stalls selling Indian snacks and sweets, natural medicines, sarees, travel vouchers, meditation kits, and charity coupons to name just a few. A group of children presumably of Indian heritage soon took to the steps of Trafalgar Square, right in front of the National Gallery, and broke out into a series of carefully choreographed dance performances that prefaced a day of Diwali celebrations. The children matched their steps to the tunes of Hindi and Gujarati music that exalted Hindu gods and goddesses. They watched over their shoulders and kept track of their peers, improvising the moment they faltered. Within this dancing troupe were two children playing the Hindu mythical couple – Ram and Sita – while three others hopped around the steps masquerading as the mythical monkeys of the same epic *Ramayana*, carrying mock pieces of rock with the letters R, A, and M written respectively on them. The epic has it that the troop of monkeys built the footbridge across the ocean by floating unsinkable pieces of rocks bearing their Lord Ram's name, thus helping him to cross over to the other side and fight the demon king Ravana. This scripture-influenced choreography paved the way to a day full of dancing and singing, this time from the stage set up right across the steps on the other side of the Square. Groups of adult performers grooving to Bollywood numbers breezed in and out of the stage all day, punctuated by folk dances from different regions of India and children appearing at regular intervals to display their acquired knowledge of Indian dance forms.

Situated in central London, Trafalgar Square gets its name from the British naval victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. It is emblematic of white British military pride with Nelson's column standing in the middle of the public square. The one-day Diwali event described above reinscribed the white colonial space of Trafalgar Square and transformed it – however temporary – into a vehicle for the celebration and assertion of cultural pride by racialized minorities such as the British Indians. In other words, through the festival and the live performances these diasporic subjects are engaged in “place-making.” A place is “space plus meaning” (Donofrio, 2010, p. 152), and it can be of varying sizes “from the small-scale of a room . . . to the large scale of a farm or a city” and beyond (Sack, 2003, p. 4). Any space can therefore be transformed into a place through the process of “place-making” – by imbuing the space with symbolic meaning – and this newly created “place” has the potential to inform identity construction (Donofrio, 2010; Massey, 1998). By channeling ICH in the form of performing arts and festivities, British Indians are able to direct place-making at the heart of the contemporary “super-diverse” London (Vertovec, 2007), a city which consolidated its global prominence at the height of the British Empire through surplus appropriation from its colonies (Mukherjee, 2010). Moreover, by lending greater visibility to their physical and nonphysical expressive culture, Indian diasporans forge a multi-ethnic sense of belonging within London's urban multi-culture. The organization of a festival of this scale draws upon the effort of a group of British Indians (mostly of Gujarati and north Indian heritage), and in turn the festival brings together and facilitates the expansion of these diasporic social networks. These occasionally produced festival spaces are also generative of the claims that diasporic groups advance for greater recognition and preservation of their cultural heritage. In mobilizing ICH, these festivals as diasporic place-making exercises also fulfil an important educational role. The places produced through festivals, rituals, and performing arts facilitate the commingling of Indian and non-Indian Londoners, thus helping the latter appreciate Indian cultural expressions. This pedagogic process also extends – as we shall see below – to Indian diasporic children

growing up in the UK. At the same time, there are internal divisions that these spaces throw into relief. For instance, the particular cultural expressions found within the DOTS platform are tied to Gujarati and northern Indian communities, evidenced in the use of Hindi and Gujarati music as well as the performance of a grand *Garba* (a circular dance form from Gujarat) as the epicenter of the celebrations. In purporting to reproduce and showcase an authentic Indian culture at the heart of London, this festival produces a particular upper-caste, middle-class, north/west Indian assemblage of tangible and intangible heritage that centers the heteronormative family. The festival, which is sponsored by several Indian companies and corporate houses, also establishes neoliberal ostentation as a metonym for Indian culture. Future studies should interrogate the political economy of these leisure spaces.

Apart from major festivals with pan-Indian diaspora appeal, there are a range of regional/religious festivities which also assume importance as sites for enacting and transmitting cultural heritage. Aparna and her husband, Sumit, for instance, are middle-class, upper-caste Indian Bengalis living in London. Their daughter Koel is 12. Aparna – an MBA by qualification and currently a housewife – often takes her software programmer husband and daughter to attend Bengali cultural festivals in and around London. Aparna, who grew up in a Hindu household, now describes her religious identity as “atheist or agnostic” and adds that “I’m not teaching my daughter to be Hindu.” Nevertheless, she feels the need to engage in certain practices linked to her cultural-religious background so that her daughter can appreciate her (intangible) heritage.

I don't have a Puja room [in my house], I don't do regular prayers or anything . . . [But] I do Saraswati puja at home, only so that my daughter gets exposure to the culture, you know.  
(Aparna)

Aparna engineers ethnic cultural capital transmission through place-making at two different scales. Despite being a self-declared “atheist or agnostic,” she celebrates Hindu religious festivals such as Saraswati Puja – which is particularly popular in Bengal – every spring at her London home by creating a “place” for the worship of Saraswati (the goddess of learning and performing arts) within the space of her living room. She also takes her family to Durga Puja celebrations in London. Durga Puja is a Hindu religious festival celebrated mostly by Bengali Hindus in autumn every year, and it is considered to be the biggest festival in the Indian state of West Bengal, where both Aparna and Sumit grew up. Here in the diaspora, Durga Puja is taken beyond its religious frame and understood as a Bengali social event where the cultural activities surrounding the religious occasion are important in their own right. Several Durga Puja celebrations are currently organized by diasporic Indian Bengali groups across the UK. Unlike in West Bengal, where installations housing the Durga idol are put up in public spaces, these diasporic Durga Puja celebrations happen indoors, almost exclusively in hired community halls. Much like the Diwali festival in Trafalgar Square, these pujas are often organized over the weekend, without strictly adhering to the exact timings of the Bengali lunar calendar. During the festival – which typically lasts for five days but is often condensed into a three-day weekend – the idol worship and rituals are accompanied by a busy schedule of cultural activities. On research visits to these venues in London, it was noteworthy that all of them had designated social spaces for children’s activities and a stage for performances which mostly featured Bollywood numbers and Bengali dance music (in particular, Tagore songs and film songs). By partaking in these celebrations, Aparna’s family is contributing to a community place-making process – a discursive

reinscription of the hired venue and the production of a Hindu-Bengali place which does not exist throughout the year for this subnational diaspora. The place so produced assumes a pedagogic role for Aparna, who argues that her daughter will learn to appreciate Bengali cultural heritage through her immersion in these festivals.

The above narratives demonstrate the role of place-making in the building of social identities. In other words, the co-creation of community leisure spaces through festivals contribute to the development of diasporic and ethnic identities. By negotiating these social spaces within their country of settlement, a subnational diaspora such as the Indian Bengalis is able to reinforce their cultural identity, weave co-ethnic social networks, and in the process hand down nonphysical cultural heritage to their children, who are now growing up in the diaspora. It must also be pointed out that the diasporic social networks that these Durga Puja celebrations draw upon and help expand, have class and caste connotations built into them because most of the organizers and participants are middle-class, upper-caste Hindu Bengalis who project their cultural heritage as the “authentic” diasporic expression of Hindu-Indian Bengaliness. In this way, place-making and ethnic cultural capital are co-constitutive, which further demonstrates the multilayered and multi-scalar dimensions of the ICH–leisure nexus amongst diasporic communities.

## **Conclusion**

This article has built on the conceptual framework of ICH as developed by the 2003 UNESCO Convention to underline how cultural heritage travels, assumes form, and is transmitted through leisure spaces of diasporic groups. Whilst academic concern has largely been confined to place-based ontologies of heritage, narratives of nonphysical cultural expressions offer an opportunity to grasp the human practices and living cultures that produce and embody these forms of intangible heritage. Pushing beyond the exclusionary list of ICH drawn up by the UNESCO, this article has embraced a broader conceptualization of ICH which can be applied to a plethora of social groups. Since racialized minorities have historically been pathologized and exoticized for their cultural practices, ICH as understood by these communities is integral to how they assert their cultural identities and nurture a sense of belonging. Concerns over the preservation and transmission of this cultural heritage therefore garner added urgency in these contexts. In light of these considerations, this article has taken up the case of Indian diasporic families in the contemporary UK to unpack the way in which leisure and ICH constitute each other. Drawing upon a qualitative study with British Indian children and their parents living in and around London, it has been demonstrated that the leisure–ICH nexus in these families is shot through with two interconnected social processes: “transmission of ethnic cultural capital” and “place-making.” In doing so, due attention has been given to how the specific subnational, linguistic, or religious affiliations of these Indian diasporans shape their non-tangible heritage vis-à-vis cultural practices and rituals. The diasporic families in this study utilized their middle-class privileges, such as economic capital and home ownership, to construct leisure spaces both within and beyond the home where ICH linked to their own background can be (re)produced.

The enactment, preservation, and transmission of ICH in the diaspora are sites for cultural contestation and negotiation. On one hand, diasporic communities have to claim their space within an urban multicultural where celebration of difference and persisting structures of racism co-exist. On the other, it lays bare the internal differentiation – along the lines of class, regional/linguistic affiliations, caste, and religion – of the Indian



diaspora, which is a heterogenous formation. Contrary to scholars who argue that in the diaspora the Indian national identity supersedes regional/subnational affiliations (Safran *et al.*, 2008; Thobani, 2019), evidence presented here shows that the two are always held in tension wherein diasporic subjects simultaneously perform their pan-Indian and regional/subnational identities. This is evident from the festivals the various families celebrate: for instance, Jagadish, who migrated from Karnataka, hosts Ganesha festival at home, while for Bengal-born Aparna it is the domestic Saraswati Puja that is particularly meaningful.

The discussion presented here points toward the traffic that exists between tangible and intangible heritage in the diaspora where one reinforces the other. Neither is simply transplanted from the place of diasporic origin to that of settlement. These movements – between places and across time – are always mediated by social positions of human subjects on one hand and the contemporary context on the other. Through this complex set of negotiations involving multiple spaces and social relationships, Indian diasporic families in London come to marshal leisure spaces to channel ICH, transmit it to the younger UK-born generation, and advance claims for greater cultural recognition and rights. These empirical insights should serve as springboards for future scholars to investigate leisure–ICH interaction in different parts of the Indian diaspora and among other migrant communities at large.

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### Notes

1. We use the notion of lived multiculturalism here to refer to the reality where multiple cultural and ethnic groups co-inhabit a social space, as opposed to the idea of multiculturalism, which is one way of thinking about and managing this diversity at the macro-level.
2. Diwali is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains across India.
3. Durga Puja is celebrated mostly by Hindu Bengalis.
4. Bollywood is a neologism that emerged in the West to signify the Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay)-based Hindi popular film industry. Besides commercial films, the term lends itself to a loosely defined collection of popular cultural products emerging from India.

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