Personal Development in a Transnational Space
Identity and Daily Lives of Indian Expat wives in the Netherlands

Master’s Thesis

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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A TRANSNATIONAL SPACE
IDENTITIES AND DAILY LIVES OF INDIAN EXPAT WIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS.

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The master’s thesis that is lying in front of you is the result of an exciting one year research process. It all started out with a research plan, followed by a three month fieldwork period during which I met a lot of wonderful Indian expat women. After all the hard work the end project is there, and I sincerely hope you will enjoy reading it.

The motivation for this research came from my personal interest in India and its many different cultures and lovely people, after visiting India for three months in 2011. The Indian expat women that I have met during my research are all very wonderful, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank them all very much for opening up to me. I am very grateful for all your input, your views and showing me your lives. Without your input, your views and all the good talks I could not have done it. I would especially like to thank Nina and Manjula as you have been there for me especially during my fieldwork.

I would also like to thank both my supervisors Dr. Kate Kirk and Dr. Ellen Bal for supporting me throughout the research process. Their enthusiasm and guidance are what has shaped this final end-product of my research. Lastly I would also like to thank my family and friends, for their continual support and motivation during the different phases of creating this master’s thesis.
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This study is about the lives of the Indian expat wives living in the Netherlands. Each of the Indian women that I have met in my research has a different story, and I try to give an insight into their lives. Since 2004 more and more Indian knowledge migrants have come to the Netherlands to work in information technology, consultancy, engineering and sometimes also management. The Dutch government has put into place a certain regulation which makes it easier for them to come here. In January 2013 at least 4000 Indian highly skilled knowledge migrants live in the Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam and Amstelveen. Many of these migrants migrate here together with their family, their wives, and children if they have these. But not much is known about their family who has come with them, and in this research I try to find out more about this. Therefore this study is relevant, as not much literature is available on Indian expat wives, especially concerning the Netherlands.

The questions I ask is how do the women live their lives here and how are their lives influenced by coming to the Netherlands? I try to find this out by looking into the relationships the women still have with India, but also by finding out more about the new relationships the women build up here. I continue to look deeper into where the women feel they want to be, as coming here is on a temporary basis.

I found that first of all the women still maintain in much contact with their family and friends from their country of origin, India. But the women also make many new contacts here, mostly with other Indian women and build up new social networks. I also came to find out that most of the women really are set on going back to India eventually. Even though they do enjoy live here very much, most of the women still have to take care of their family in India eventually.

When the women came here many had to quit their jobs, and then came here dependent on their husband. A few of the women in my research have found a job here but most did not. The women that are not working are still very busy, they do things they want to do and the women who have children are very involved in their children’s school. Here in the Netherlands the women have more freedom than they previously had in India, especially when considering mobility, the possibility to go around by themselves, and personal development, to do the things they love to do. In overall the Indian expat women seem to enjoy their lives here.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

There I went off on my bike to my very first meeting with an Indian expat wife. When I found the house, with the help of my Smartphone I must admit, I pressed the doorbell. I was greeted by Nabha who immediately made me feel welcome. I followed her up the stairs, as her house is on the 2nd and 3rd floor, and when we were about to enter her house she reminded me I should always take off my shoes in an Indian house. Which of course I knew but maybe since this was my first visit, I just did not think of this myself. I quickly took them off and we went inside, where I was given a lovely “proper Indian Tea” as Nabha called it, together with some delicious home-made cake (field notes January).

Even though Nabha and many other Indian women are now living in the Netherlands, the women still hold on to certain cultural traditions, such as taking off your shoes in the house. Most of their contact is with other expats, of whom many are also Indians. Many of the women have given up their job to come here, to a new country where they do not know the language or customs. Their husbands have a good job, but what happens to their wives?

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the lives of the Indian knowledge migrant wives in the Netherlands, and how they feel about living here. The Indian knowledge migrants are expats, and work in for example information technology, consultancy, engineering and management (Bal, 2012). An expat can be defined as “highly skilled, highly educated migrant of a middle or good social level, who is professionally oriented” (Gatti, 2009: 13). The wives are further on referred to as Indian expat wives or Indian expat women.

The migration of Indian knowledge migrants to the Netherlands has significantly increased since 2004 (Wiesbrock & Hercoq, 2012; Bal, 2012). The reason for the sudden increase in Indian knowledge migration to the Netherlands is the special knowledge migrant regulations\[1\], which came to existence in October 2004. This special regulation was introduced by the Dutch government to attract highly skilled migrants from all over the world and since the introduction of it the number of expats has exponentially increased (Bal, 2012).

Furthermore “the majority of highly qualified Indian migrants work and live in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area” (Bal, 2012:15), this is where most of the Indian companies are, and other businesses

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1 The “knowledge migrant regulations” or in Dutch: “kennismigranten regeling” can be translated as knowledge-migrant regulations which are special regulations for highly skilled workers who want to work in the Netherlands for more than three months. These regulations were set in place in 2004 to ensure a quick and clear procedure of entry. It is linked to a wage-criteria and age-category where above 30 years old a migrant has to earn a brute salary of €52.010 per year, and under 30 years that is €38.141 per year. In 2007 another category was added, which gives recent graduated students a chance to search for a new job in one year (to earn a brute starter salary of €27.336 per year) (IND, 2013).
hiring Indian expats. The expats work in for example information technology, consultancy, engineering and management.

On the first of January 2013 more than 4000 Indian knowledge migrants live in the Netherlands, and most of them are male. Hence, more than 200 of these men have brought their wives and children, the nuclear family (Nicolaas: CBS, 2013), which is common for highly educated migrants (Gatti, 2009). The partner and children are considered to be family migrants, which are family members of a migrant who is already present in a host country. This type of family migration is also called family reunification, where family bonds existed before the migration (Entzinger et. al. 2013:7). If however the family migrant wants to stay in the Netherlands but the sponsor leaves the country, the family migrant is not allowed to stay, in this case the Indian expat wife. As a result the sponsor needs to support the family migrant financially for five years.

Furthermore the family members of the knowledge migrants have the opportunity to use a fast-procedure to apply for a residence permit, which even allows them to work (Bal, 2012). The Indian expats stay in the Netherlands for a few years, and consider themselves transients rather than citizens (Bal, 2012). Only few of the expats decide to stay in the Netherlands and settle.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research is part of an NWO research project: Migration, development, and citizenship: Notions of belonging and civic engagement among Indian (knowledge-) Migrants in the Netherlands and Return Migrants in India (Bal, 2012). “This project studies how skilled Indian migrants contribute to development through socio-cultural remittances, how they construe (trans-/national) identity and notions of belonging, and how these processes are envisioned/influenced by government policies in these countries” (NWO, 2013). This project is led by Dr. Ellen Bal and Dr. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, and the main researchers are Dr. Kate Kirk in the Netherlands and Dr. Tripathy Ratnakar in India. Within this proposed research project it is my goal to find out more about the lives of the Indian expats wives. Who are these family migrants in the Netherlands, how do they give meaning to their lives and what do they do?

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2 The partner who already lived in the Netherlands to which the family migrant is linked (Entzinger et. al.,2013:4)
**Research Question**

“In what way is the identity and life of the Indian expat wives influenced by their migration to the Netherlands and are they really tied migrants?”

The identity of the Indian expat wives could be influenced by the migration to the Netherlands in different ways, I want to find out in what ways, and subsequently what impact the migration has on the lives of the women. The term ‘tied migrant’ here addresses a double meaning, it could be true in some way, but not in entirely.

To give a clear answer to the research question the following two sub-questions are formulated:

- How and with whom do these women maintain (transnational) relationships?
- How do these women experience feelings of belonging? Do they feel they belong in the Netherlands?

The first question refers to the transnational relationships of the women, but I will also look into new social relationships developed in the Netherlands. Moreover it is also important to see how the women feel they belong, and how their feelings shape their way of life here in the Netherlands.

Furthermore in literature it is often suggested that expat women can be seen as ‘tied migrants’ or ‘trailing wives’. This usually means that the wives follow their husbands to any country, often work related (expatriates), at the expense of the wives’ career (Geist & McManus, 2011). I argue that this concept is too simply phrased for the Indian expat women in the Netherlands. The women can be seen as tied migrants since they came here together with their husband for his job, but in the Netherlands a process of untying has begun.

Even though the women are in the Netherlands on the basis of their husband’s work, also seen as their sponsor as Entzinger et al. state, the women get an opportunity to undergo personal development and experience freedom. Social contacts are still very much there, new friends have come in existence and overall they experience rather happy lives here.

**Thesis Outline**

This thesis will continue with the theoretical framework, highlighting the area of research of gender and migration. Also reviewed in this chapter are feelings of belonging, identity and transnationalism in order to have a closer look into theory looking specifically at female migrants. Then a short chapter will
elaborate further whom my informants are, explaining more about their background, which is followed by the methodology chapter.

The methodology will show what data collection methods were used for this research, amongst which are participant observation, interviews and field notes. The methodology is followed by two data chapters, in which all the data gathered during a 3 month field work period is presented. The first of these chapters, (Re) Creating social networks, focuses more on transnational relations and how the women build up new social networks. The second data chapter, making a life as an expat wife, will elaborate more on the effects of migration on work and education for a tied migrant. I will show the impact of the migration on the women’s life, and find out where the women feel they belong. This chapter is followed by a conclusion which will give an answer to the research question and sub-questions. In the Appendix the list of questions used during the interviews can be found.
CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the interview Salma keeps expressing how happy she is about living in the Netherlands. Even though she did not want to come here at first, she is very happy now that she is here. She continues to speak about all the things she is allowed to do here, that were not possible or difficult to do in India. At first I thought she might be exaggerating that she enjoys it here so much, but after speaking with her for more than an hour I realize she really does enjoy living here very much (field notes Salma)

What I describe above is something I noticed with many of my informants, they are sincerely happy to be here. The women are making new friends, attending clubs, organizing potluck lunches and engage in many other activities.

The area of research within which this project is grounded is gender and migration. This is because this research focuses mainly on women in migration, how they have experienced the migration as a spouse of an expatriate. This theoretical framework will discuss the literature and current debates on knowledge immigrants, with a specific focus towards gender and women in migration. Throughout this chapter I will give short examples of my experiences of my fieldwork but I will go in more depth about this in chapter 5 and 6 in which are solely based on the data from the fieldwork. I will first focus on the theory surrounding tied migrants, to explain how this is perceived.

The experiences of tied migrants can best be understood by first looking at gender in migration, the role of gender in migration and specifically Indian women in migration. I will then begin unwrapping the concepts of sense of belonging and transnationalism, whilst taking into consideration identity and especially the transmigrant’s identity. These concepts are central in the literature, the relation between these concepts is also of importance, and will assist in formulating my argument. Sense of belonging I use to show that people can belong in many different ways and it is a dynamic process. The women belong here but also in India or even elsewhere. Transnationalism plays a very large role in the lives of the Indian migrants, as they develop a transmigrant identity. Many ties are still there with India and the women are set on going back there eventually. At the end of this chapter I will show the social and scientific relevance of this research.
GENDER: WOMEN IN MIGRATION

The literature on Indian expat women can be rather negative. Take for example Thapan (2013) who found that the Indian immigrant women in Italy are isolated and are excluded from both the domestic sphere and social worlds in which they now live. The women feel alone and distressed, and their attempts to integrate are not always successful (Thapan, 2013). Thapan also argues that “inequality, contestation and struggle are three issues that can be found amongst migrants throughout the world” (Thapan, 2013). I understand Thapan might think this can be the case for many migrants all over the world, but I argue that this is at least not the case in the Netherlands when considering the Indian knowledge migrants.

TIED MIGRANT

Geist & McManus define tied migrant in the following way: “When the labor market advantages of mobility accrue primarily to one partner (most often the husband), the other partner (most often the wife) is considered a “tied mover.” For the tied mover, the household gains from migration may come at the expense of her own career” (Geist & McManus, 2011:198).

Many studies in the field of migration focus on transnationalism and identity. However, only few focus on the reasons for migration or the motivation behind the move. Geist & McManus (2011:197) argue that “household earnings, income and gender specialization increase following job migration”. The household or nuclear family also needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about migration. Furthermore married women who are migrating do not necessarily have to stop working, especially as their equal breadwinning status may prevent them from becoming ‘tied movers’ (Geist & McManus, 2011). If women do work before they move but only as ‘secondary’ rather than as ‘equal breadwinner’ they are essentially likely to become tied migrants. The migration can reduce the chance for them to work (Geist & McManus, 2011). This can be seen with more than ten of my informants. Also, Gupta et al. found that many Indian expatriate spouses gave more priority to their husband’s career over their own career (Gupta et. al. 2012).

Can the women in migration be seen as ‘trailing wife’ or ‘trailing mother’? (Cooke, 2001). Cooke argues the tied migrant should rather be seen as a ‘trailing’ mother than a trailing wife. The consequences for the migration rely on the parental status. For mothers the migration caused a longer period of not working than for those women who did not have children.
Many married women give up their own careers as they want to support their husband’s career. This would suggest a dominant gender role in migration, the men being the dominant factor, and this would suggest the women are the ‘tied migrants’.

Since the 1990s literature on women in migration started to be published. In this literature there were some shortcomings according to George (2005). The first is that most of the scholars focused on women solely as secondary migrants, as there was a trend of women following men in the migration itself. The second was that it focused more on women who work in the tertiary labor market, or as undocumented workers. The third was that scholars sometimes focused almost too much on women, and did not consider the immigrant men also changing due to the migration (George, 2005). My research too does not focus too much on men, but I did focus on the relationship between the wives and their husbands, from the women’s perspective.

**WOMEN IN MIGRATION**

There are three important developments which can be seen in the literature on women in migration in the last twenty years are; the recognition of differences between men and women’s motivations to migrate; the incorporation of social network concepts and lastly the recognition that migration decisions are not made by individuals but more or less by their households and/or communities (Curran & Sugay, 2001). Again, the last development points out that it might not be one individual, or man, who makes the decision to migrate, but the entire household, including the wife who is involved too.

Furthermore the role of social networks in migration is increasing, and this influences culture change. More new social networks are established, while previously existing social networks continue to exist. Gender identity shapes the ties within networks and this network might influence the image and (cultural) expectations of persons within these groups. Those networks can increase gender inequality, depending on the kind of social network, as the social ties within these networks are sometimes seen as highly influential (Curran & Sugay, 2001). This makes one wonder if it is this good to be a part of a larger social network in the new country, as this research shows this can have a negative impact on an individual. However as gender identity is what shapes the ties of networks, it is important to consider the role of gender too.

In earlier literature many scholars have focused on the household as a key site to find out more about the gender relations between a husband and wife (George, 2005). During my research I only saw two of
the husbands, and in one of those occasions I could see that the husband took ‘power’ over the conversation I had with his wife.

George (2005:25) states that scholarship on gender and immigration showed that immigrant women in the United States who found work, even as secondary breadwinners, expanded their personal autonomy and independence. However these women remained within the ‘traditional’ patriarchal family situation. It is the question if these women even take advantage of their new personal autonomy and independence and stand up for the traditional roles in the household. Some scholars say the household is where the women resist. However, others say this is not always the case, as the women did have something to negotiate with (George, 2005).

Scholars seeing the household as a bastion of resistance, looked at this as a resistance against racism by the host society. The home was then seen as the ‘safe haven’, where women will allow gender subordination (George, 2005). Evidently the family itself became a necessary support for the women, and even when the women would find work of some kind they would still maintain their patriarchal roles in the household (George, 2005). Their roles were simply extended. My fieldwork data proves that is not necessarily the case for all the Indian expat wives in the Netherlands. Many of the women do make sure the patriarchal roles change when they too work. Sometimes the cleaning for example is outsourced to someone else. This is not the same for everyone though, for some of the women their work is merely an extension of the jobs they already had to do in and around the house, and they need to plan their work accordingly.

When the household is seen as a locus of negotiation, there are those theorists such as Pessar and Lamphere who say that work indeed affects gender relations at home, the smaller the wage gap between wife and husband the more authority women have and the more men contribute in the household (George,2005:27). In the households of my informants not many of the men contributed in the household, so this could indeed be the case for many expatriates. During the research I have only heard about three or four men who contribute in the household, and then mostly with cooking only.

In the case of the Indian Expat wives, only 9 of my informants are secondary breadwinners, and of these women some did claim their husband also does things in and around the household. This could possibly mean that the patriarchal roles are changing. Interestingly, some of the Indian expat women did not know how to cook before their marriage, when they then had an arranged marriage they then learned how to cook from their husbands. Could this also be seen as a change in gender relations? With a couple of the informants who did not work I also saw a change in the gender relations at home. As they grew
up in a more modern Indian family (as exclaimed by themselves) they had such power over their husband so that they also would do things in and around the house.

Pedraza (1991) argues that already in the 1990s women found themselves more freedom after the migration. Whilst Pedraza argued this in 1991 I still find it interesting that even then women in migration found themselves to have more freedom than before the migration is something which is essential in my research. Living in the Netherlands has given the women more independence and has caused the women’s identity to change overtime. However their (sudden) independence is not the only change for the women. The migration itself has caused the women’s identity to change overtime.

**ROLE OF GENDER**

Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) argue that migration can also increase the role of gender within the family/household. As argued by Sinatti (2014) in transnational families the gender roles are subject to change due to migration. Migration causes new inequalities to take shape between family members, both women and men need to adjust to the new situation. Intersectionality is a way through which the effect of migration experiences for men and women can be researched (Sinatti, 2014).

Besides the role-of gender change it is also imperative to understand that until quite recently there was a common belief that women always followed their husbands wherever they go. This is not necessarily the case anymore, as women do have some legal standing in migration. Subsequently when a woman does migrate for or with her husband, many of these women stay at home, working on the household, but this work should also be acknowledged as work (Palriwala & Uberoi, 2008).

Furthermore George (2005) argues that migration has an impact on the gender relations between men and wife, but can also have effect in work and the community. George speaks about the immigration of female nurses from Kerala to the United States. The nurses’ men then took over more of the household, and eventually this causes traditional gender relations to shift (George, 2005). For some of the Indian expat wives in the Netherlands it is indeed the case that they now the only ones taking care of the household, in India the women often had maids. In India the women themselves they were working often too, as secondary breadwinners most of the time, but still earning money for the household (please note that not all the women were working previously, some were still studying or unemployed). Now in the Netherlands traditional gender relations are reinforced and the wife is in some cases somewhat forced to take care of the household and children. It is a problem that even when they do
find work in the Netherlands they do not have anyone to take care of their children, as there is no family support system. I will further discuss this in Chapter 5.

Furthermore George states that “..The men became downwardly mobile, both economically and socially” (George,2005:19). Here in the Netherlands my informants have not at all become downwardly mobile, economically or socially. Their husband’s income allows them to do what they like to do here, and they have many social contacts, (who are mostly Indian).

INDIAN WOMEN IN MIGRATION

Indian women in migration however also face other challenges such as dowry in marriage. As Pedraza (1991) argues that their role in migration has been neglected, this might have resulted in literature written on the role of marriage, money and gender within migration. In Indian culture dowry can perhaps still be seen as crucial in a marriage, and is still very powerful in the Indian Diaspora (Sheel, 2008). The dowry relates to the family of both women and men, and is still seen as a way to reinforce relationships with India. A case study in an Indian community in Vancouver for example shows that the transnational relations and transnational identity is of much importance within the community. The focus is still on India, and the Indians here create their own communities, in which their own identity can be kept (Sheel, 2008). When focusing this much on transnational relations it might be that the women who live in this community only speak to others inside this community. My research shows that this is also the case in the Netherlands, most of the women most of the time have contact with other Indian women, or other expats. Not much contact is there with Dutch people.

Xiang Biao also considers gender in migration, speaking about migration of IT professionals. The focus however is more on gender as a central organizing principle of social life. Migration is seen as the core surrounding those social relations (Biao, 2008). Biao emphasizes that migration is a gendered experience, but gender relations are central in the actual ‘system’ of migration of IT professionals. In this system not only gender relations are important, but also caste-relations. As noticed by Biao during fieldwork in Sydney, it was surprising to see that the ‘traditions’ were more reinforced than actually ‘Westernized’. Especially in the case of dowry, the highly educated IT professionals who has migrated to the West remain very proud of their culture and might even demand a higher dowry as they would when they would have stayed in India (Biao,2008:247). This is however also seen as a kind of resource transfer, whereby the parents of the man receive some sort of reward for educating their son. Surprisingly when the dowry is promised and later on not paid, dowry torture to the women could be seen as quite common according to Biao (2008). Biao A more balanced development agenda would be
needed to go against this. Social stratification is still very much visible transnationally, even in this
globalized world (Biao, 2008).

FEELINGS OF BELONGING
Two of my informants who previously also lived in other European countries, Sweden and Paris,
mentioned to me that they felt more at home here in Amsterdam than in the other countries they
previously came from. In those other countries it was difficult because of the language, it was not easy
to find new people and make friends. Here in Amsterdam this is all much easier, and sometimes it even
feels like India for Reva.

DEFINING FEELINGS OF BELONGING
According to Yuval-Davis (2006), sense of belonging is an emotional issue, which is naturalized, made to
feel as if it was always there, and sometimes politicized when threatened. Belonging and the politics of
belonging are both of importance in migration studies, this paper will however mainly focus more on
belonging itself. Furthermore she elaborates more on belonging itself, and states that it “can be an act
of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way” (Yuval-Davis,
2006).

“People can belong in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments” (Yuval-Davis,
2006). This sense of belonging however is not the same for everyone, it can differ per person or group.
Furthermore Yuval-Davis (2006) also argues that belonging can be seen as a way of identifying yourself
or even identifying yourself with others and thereby belonging should be seen as a dynamic process.
According to Yuval-Davis the notion of belonging can be understood in three different analytical levels
which include social locations, individuals’ identifications, emotional attachments to various
collectivities, groupings and lastly ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own
and others belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Social locations refer to people belonging to a certain group, gender, race, nation kinship or anything
related to that. These aspects are social or economic locations, which have an influence on power
relations. Individuals’ identifications and emotional attachments refer to identities as the stories which
the people tell, the narratives. Not all of these stories consider belonging to a certain group however
many are, some even entail the perception of what it would mean to be in a certain group (Yuval-
Davis, 2006). Ethical and political values are also important in belonging, as not only social locations and
constructions of the individual are important. These are the ways in which identities are judged, and show how certain boundaries are drawn, or should be drawn.

Thapan (2005) argues that past and present experiences influence a person’s identity; subsequently women (and men) are prone to change their identity when migrating. This again shows the importance of sense of belonging in identity. Sense of belonging is however also important in transnationalism, when the transnational ties are very important for a migrant it could maybe suggest the migrant still feels they belong to their country of origin.

In the case of the Indian expat women it could be seen that quite a few of the women claimed to belong wherever their husband or family was. Other claimed they did not belong somewhere especially, as they for example had been moving around all their lives.

TRANSNATIONALISM

Many of the women are still very much in contact with their home country, and even though they are living here in the Netherlands for now, at least 25 of the women know they will go back to India in a month, a year or maybe even in a few years. The migration of the Indian expat women is a transnational experience. Not everything in India is given up, it is the women’s aim to eventually go back to India again.

DEFINING TRANSNATIONALISM

In order to understand what a transmigrant is it is first of importance to define transnationalism. Transnationalism can be defined as “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together with their country of origin and their country of settlement” (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 1). “Whereby social fields are networks of networks that many be locally situated or extend nationally or transnationally” [Glick-Schiller et. al.2003 as cited by Glick-Schiller et al 2006]. These immigrants can be called transmigrants, which develop and maintain many relations, which go across borders. Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) argue that identities are formed, actions are taken and decisions are being made within social networks on a transnational level. Many transnational migrants support their family back home, by for example sending money or other gifts, this is how some transnational social fields can be formed. The migration itself somewhat transforms the identity of the migrant, as they arrive in a new country of residence, keeping certain home-traits, but engaging in complex activities across borders (Glick-Schiller et al.,1992). According to Glick-Schiller et al. the
transnational migrants use their social relations and multiple identities in order to cope with the new situation they find themselves in after migration. This might be how these transmigrants give meaning to their life, as for them this is a way of coping with the new, perhaps difficult, circumstances.

All the Indian expat women I have spoken to in the Netherlands claimed to be happy living here. One of the main reasons for this is that they have many social contacts, a large network, and they are able to keep in much contact with home. It is however a fact that they maintain in the Indian community, mostly only having Indian friends in their social networks. However there are a few local Dutch contacts too, who at times assist the migrants in dealing with the Dutch way of living or small issues.

TRANSNATIONAL TIES
According to George (2005) the Indian immigrant community in the United States continues to have transnational ties with India. This is also the case with the Indian expats community in the Netherlands. Especially in the domestic sphere this is still very much alive, the immigrant community and the community at home both depend on these ties (George, 2005). Currently the Indian expat community in the Metropolitan Area is still in contact with their community in India, most of my informants claimed their parents do not depend on them financially, but more emotionally.
Furthermore George argues that it could be the case that so much transnational ties are still in place for the migrant to be able to claim status back home. The Indian community in the US which was studied attempted to claim their status in two different ways, first in the immigrant community, and then through the home-community. It could also be that they claim status by having a ‘green card’ and are available for marriage. This last point is not very relevant for this research so it will not be discussed further here.

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migrants’ incorporation (Thapan, 2005). Furthermore the transmigrants create multiple identities, both in their new host country and in their home country, their roots are not forgotten. Some of the migrants might identify more with one of these countries, or better to say, societies, however they still hold on to multiple identities (Glick Schiller et al. 1995).

Before defining transmigrant’s identity first identity needs to be defined. Identity can be defined in many different ways, however currently especially when spoken of identity in anthropology Eriksen argues one should speak of social identity (Eriksen, 2010). Social identity is contextual and situational, constructed socially and also gendered. Eriksen also argues that social identities are segmentary in character, as being a family does not necessarily mean you are also part of the larger (ethnic) group. As Baumann defines it “all identities are identifications, all identifications are dialogical” [Baumann 1999 as cited by Eriksen 2010:93] and identity formation is dynamic and many sided” (Eriksen, 2010). One should never think of members of a group as culturally similar, the members might relate in some ways, but their identity is always personal.

Glick Schiller et al. (1995) claim that many contemporary migrants are in fact transmigrants, which is in line with what Thapan states. These transmigrants adapt to their new country, however their roots are still in their home country, and many links still make sure this is not forgotten. This transnational migration proves to have a large impact on the new country the migrants stay in, especially politically and economically (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). When taken the example of the U.S., it could be seen that there are many debates on the transnational migrants, inclusion and exclusion is taking place, and because of ‘illegal migrants’ the legal migrants are almost forced to adapt their identity to the US identity. One could speak of a discourse of identity which links the migrants more towards the US then their homeland (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). This would suggest the migrants are more or less forced to change their identity. In the Netherlands the Indian migrants are not at all forced to change their identity. I believe that the women’s identity does change overtime due to the migration, but this is not at all forced, and most of the women see it as a positive change.

**SOCIAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE**

The social relevance of this research is that the migration of the Indian expats to the Netherlands could be a gendered experience. Furthermore there is little literature available on the wives of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands. This research will go further into the context of the expat women in Netherlands on the basis of the previous research conducted within the NWO research project. Sarah
Janssen (2013), who also wrote her master’s thesis within this project of the NWO, gave a better insight into the notions of home and sense of belonging for Indians expats in the Netherlands. In her research only 7 out of 31 informants were female (Janssen, 2013:37). Hence this research fills a gap in the literature as there is not much other work on Indian expat’s wives in the Netherlands while there are many Indian expats present here. I hope to make a meaningful contribution to this area of research. It is of relevance to explain more about their feelings of belonging, how their identity changes and how and with whom they maintain their large social networks. As this will show what the Indian expat women’s live really looks like.

CONCLUSION
This theoretical framework has assisted in this research by showing the different aspects of migration, with a focus on gender in migration. I continued further by explaining feelings of belonging, transnationalism and the (transmigrant) identity and how these are all influenced by the experience of the migration. Lastly the social & scientific relevance shows the importance of this study, how it fills a gap in the literature.
After reviewing the theory chapter in which this research is grounded it is of importance to now look further into who my informants are, and what is their background is.
CHAPTER 3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE INDIAN EXPAT WIVES

This chapter will give more background information on my informants, in order to give a better view into who the Indian expat women are. I will start by reviewing how many Indian expat wives I have met and how much contact I had with them. Then I will give a description of the background of my informants. Throughout this chapter and the following chapters I will also give short personal introductions of the Indian expat women, to tell their story.

In total I have had contact with 30 women. At the end of my fieldwork period I had also actually met with 25 of the women, and with 21 women I had also conducted an interview. Unfortunately five of the women I was not able to meet in person, the women were simply too busy or reluctant to meet with me. I was able to gather some information from the few times we spoke through facebook or phone. Most of the time I would meet the women at their homes, but on two occasions I have met the women in a different setting, once in a grand café and once at a university. Aisha, Nabha, Meenakshi, Sita, Sadhya and Sameena I have met with and spoken to on a regular basis throughout the fieldwork period. Aisha I visited regularly to help her and her daughter learn Dutch. The contact was sometimes through whatsapp, but mostly through facebook, or even email in the case of Sameena. I would most of the time visit the women during the day, and the visit would be started with coffee, tea or Indian tea (Chai) with snacks, and often I was also invited for delicious lunches.

Mithra, Savita and Padma I have also visited quite a few times, and we mostly spoke through whatsapp and/or facebook. Another 14 women I did also visit at home, but most of the time only once or twice, most of the time for the interview alone. I visited the women for a few hours in the morning or afternoon.

THE INFORMANTS

Most of the women I have spoken to currently live in Amstelveen, which is bordering Amsterdam, named Amsterdam Metropolitan Area by the municipality (Bal, 2012). Furthermore, two of my informants live in Hoofddorp and there is even one in Hilversum. Even though the women live relatively close to each other and all near Amsterdam, this was not always the case when they still lived in India. The women are from all over India, but many of the women I have met are from the South of India. Religion, caste, language, education & work are only a few of the many differences the women have but

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3 Please note that not all my informants lived in India before migrating to the Netherlands. A few previously lived elsewhere, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden or Paris.
for this research I chose to focus on these topics as they show the main settings of where the women come from.

Considering the religious background of the Indian expat women a few things stood out. First of all, almost all of my informants are Hindu, but a few are focused more on Buddhism these days. Almost all of the Hindu informants did have a specific place in the house with a small altar, sometimes an entire room which was not used otherwise would be used for this. Quite a few women also do yoga on a daily or weekly basis, this depends on how busy their schedule is. There are also a few of my informants who do not practice any religion currently, but are originally Hindu.

Only one of my informants, Sameena, is a Roman Catholic, she and her family still regularly visit a church in either Amstelveen or Amsterdam. *Sameena has been in the Netherlands since 2011, and lives in Amstelveen with her husband and one year old son. Their son goes to daycare while her husband goes to work at ING and Sameena herself goes to her traineeship. Sameena is from Mangalore, and her mother tongue is Konkani. They came here for her husband’s job, and she is happy to finally have found something for herself too.*

Anathi is from a Sikh family, but her husband is a Hindu. *Anathi has been in the Netherlands for a year and a half now, and she lives in a house in Amstelveen with her husband, two children and the family’s dog. Anathi’s husband works for Philips, but she herself quit working when they got married. Anathi is from Punjab, but has been moving around all her life.*

Even though caste seems to be less important nowadays, I still found it interesting to review which castes my informants were from. It was seen that most of the women are from a higher caste, mostly from the Brahmin caste, one woman was from the Kshatriya caste and one woman was from a lower caste. Even though most of the women are from a higher caste, it seemed to me that the women really did not care so much for their caste. Seven of the mothers made this even clearer by saying their children can marry whoever they would like to marry.

India has many different languages, the Constitution of India has recognized 22 different languages, however only two languages can be used for official purposes: Hindi and English (Indian Embassy, 2013). This makes it very difficult for Indians to have one common language.

Nabha would say that English is the most common language, but at home she would still speak her mother tongue Tamil. Her daughter prefers to speak English as she has to speak this at school too.
Nabha, who is one of my key informants, is a documentary maker by profession who currently lives in the Netherlands for almost 2 years, in Amstelveen with her husband and seven year old daughter. They are from Bangalore. Her husband works for an environmental organization in Amsterdam, and her daughter goes to one of the International schools. Unfortunately Nabha could not find work here, but she did have her own company in India. Here Nabha loves to do many things, such as taking pictures of the Dutch surroundings during long walks.

At Anathi’s home English was also mostly spoken because before coming here they lived in Sweden for a few years and her children are now very used to English. They have almost forgotten about their mother tongue Hindi but Anathi keeps on trying to teach them again.

This is the case with many of my informants, as the women are from all over India it is difficult to say which language is spoken most, but at home they always speak their mother tongue. The most common languages of my informants are: Marathi, Kannada, Hindi, Bengali, Konkani and Malayalam.

Reviewing the education of the Indian expat women it can be seen that most of them are highly educated women. Almost all the women have at least finished their bachelors, and at least 10 of the women have studied further for their master, PhD, MBA or even Postdoc. Studies include various topics such as such as Finance, Science, Zoology, Film & Television Production, Botany, Commerce, Architecture, Information Technology, Accounting and Psychology.

Some of the women were still studying for their masters or so when they came to the Netherlands. Both Meenakshi and Asha for example say that they might pick up their masters as soon as they go back to India.

Meenakshi has been in the Netherlands for 8 years already, and both she and her husband are applying for a Dutch passport now. Meenakshi moved here soon after she got married at a young age and they have lived in several apartments in Amstelveen. While her husband works in IT for Deloitte, she herself does volunteer work in Amsterdam. Meenakshi is from Hampi, South India.

Asha has only arrived in the Netherlands recently, and is also still quite young, she is of my own age actually. Asha did not have the opportunity to finish her masters, as then she got married and they left for the Netherlands. When they go back she could finish her education.

When looking at work background of the Indian expat women it can be seen that at least 20 out of the 30 women left behind a (good) job in India, and now have difficulties finding a new job. In total I have had contact with
Out of the 30 women, 9 women currently hold a paid position, mostly part-time but some also full-time. The women work in software, at a university, in banking, in finance, at an international school or they own their own company, such as a beauty salon or a marketing research company. What I found interesting was that the term ‘luck’ is often used by the women who are currently holding good positions in the Netherlands. Somehow the women who have a job here feel they are very lucky to have the possibility to work in the Netherlands. This could mean that these women might feel that the other women who want to work but cannot find a position are less lucky.

HOUSING
To further consider the background my informants come from I think it is good to shortly review the different housing setting in which my informants live. Many of my informants live in apartments, however there are also a few who live in houses. I think I did notice a difference in standard of living. Some of my informants live in rented, pre-furnished, apartments; whilst others live in bought apartments they decorated themselves. Some of the women live in rented houses with a few of their own furniture pieces, but a few others live in bought houses which are quite large who also have some of their own furniture pieces. The larger houses especially would have more Indian furniture as well, it seemed in these households more personal belonging were taken with to the Netherlands. One thing all the houses and apartments did have in common was that there would be personal pictures, from their family and themselves. Another thing all the houses and apartments had in common was their kitchen and food things. All kitchens had their stack or cupboard full with Indian spices, and certain utensils or kitchen machines. With some of the houses or apartments I could already notice it was an Indian household because of the different Indian scents coming towards you.

Savita lives in an apartment in Amsterdam, the apartment is relatively new, and I am welcomed by the scent of Indian spices when I walked in. There are two very large comfortable couches, accompanied by a lovely coffee table. There is also a large dining table and a few cupboards. The kitchen is half open, and there is a balcony too. The apartment is bought, and she lives here since 2011 but she and her husband are already looking for other houses where they can also easily have a pet. Savita was not the only Indian wife I have spoken to who wishes to have a pet. Even though it might not be very common to have a pet in India, at least four of my informants would love to have a pet.

_Savita has been in the Netherlands for quite a few years already. She is originally from the South of India, Bangalore to be more precise. She and her husband are currently living in Slotervaart, Amsterdam in an Apartment. I was introduced to Savita through Meenakshi, who had met her at one of the festivals of the_
Kannada Association in the Netherlands. Before coming to the Netherlands Savita worked in banking, but now she is on a ‘break’ and really enjoys that. Since the move to the Netherlands she lives in India for at least three months a year.

Madhu lives in an apartment of the Biesbosch in Amstelveen. It is a pre-furnished apartment with a balcony. Before living here she has lived in apartments where maids would do everything everyday so it was much getting used to when she came here. Now Madhu and her husband have bought a new house in India in Bangalore, which will be ready by the end of 2014. This house will be 4 times the size of the flat. This is really very different from this apartment. Madhu’s apartment (including furniture and size) is relatively similar to the other apartments in this apartment building where 3 other of my informants live.

Madhu is originally from Kerala but she grew up in Mumbai. Madhu I was introduced to by Nabha through facebook. She has been in the Netherlands for almost five years now and plans to stay a maximum of two more years. She has a bachelor in Commerce, and is currently working part time at a school. Her husband works for Orakel Financial services as a software consultant.

Anathi’s house in Amstelveen is quite large and looks lovely. There are many books, which she all brought from India I found out while visiting her. This house is also bought, and it also has a very large garden. Anathi’s and Lakshmi’s houses are actually just around the corner, so on one day I visited both houses. Lakshmi’s house is also quite large, and even has a pool in the garden. This is one of the reasons they chose this house Lakshmi’s says. She is renting it though as she is not sure how long they will stay in the Netherlands. Anathi’s and Lakshmi’s children all go to the ISA, which is the International School of Amsterdam. It seems Anathi’s, Lakshmi and the other moms whose children go to ISA have more to spend on their houses than the mothers whose children go to AICS.

Lakshmi and Anathi are good friends and are both very much involved in the International School of Amsterdam(ISA). Lakshmi also teaches a group of women there how to sew, and has started a few new projects. She and Anathi are also very involved when new Indians come to the ISA.

CONCLUSION

Even though the 30 women I have spoken to are mostly Hindu and from higher castes, the women all have very different stories to tell. My informants are from different places in India, and at least seven

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4 The ISA is the International School of Amsterdam, and this will be elaborated on in the data chapters
5 The AICS is the Amsterdam International Community School and will also be elaborated on in the data chapters
different languages are spoken by them. The women are highly educated, and almost 20 of the women had to leave behind their job for the migration to the Netherlands. The women have in common that they are all from India, but other than that nothing they live in very different settings. The personal introductions of the women will be continued in the following chapters, to give more voice to the women’s personal stories.

Now that I explained more about whom my informants are I will now show how this research is done in the methodology chapter.
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will first shortly discuss how I got into contact with my informants. More will be explained about the various data collection methods which were used in the fieldwork period. In the first half of the fieldwork period mostly participant observation was carried out, in which I visited the women on a daily basis. In the second half of the fieldwork I mostly conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews. In March I also tried to have a focus group.

SNOWBALLING EFFECT

The snowballing effect was proven very effective in my research, as I got to know most of my informants through the first woman I had met in the field, Nabha. Nabha introduced me further to many other women, through facebook, and throughout my research I continued to use facebook and I will explain this further in the next paragraph. Nandini I was introduced to through my roommate at the time of the fieldwork, who herself works for Deloitte, where three of my informant’s husband’s also. Lakshmi is the woman who has put me into contact with quite a few of the ISA-mothers, who I all met on one afternoon at ISA itself.

FACEBOOK

Facebook private message (PM)-possibility has proven itself important throughout my fieldwork period. First of all my first supervisor, Kate, introduced me to some of her contacts through a group message on facebook. I send all the women in this message a private message, and received two positive responses of informants in Hoofddorp. Secondly Nabha who I met in my first week of the fieldwork period is rather active on Facebook, and she too added me in not one but two facebook group messages in order for me to meet new people. In these messages I then further introduced myself, and because of doing this I suddenly had six new appointments. Thirdly after a few weeks I noticed

Figure 1 The photo collage I posted on facebook.
that I would continually check my facebook if one of my informants had put up a new picture or so. I would always like their pictures if I found them good of course that is, and felt this might bring me closer to the women somehow. When I would visit them I could also ask them about these pictures put on facebook.

In figure 1 the photo collage I had posted on facebook after the concert can be found. I posted this after asking for their permission. With many of the women I maintained contact through facebook for the entire fieldwork period, and with some I still do.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The participant observation gave me a great insight into how the Indian expat women live in the Netherlands. I would go to my informant’s houses and we would have coffee or tea with some snacks, and we would just chat for hours sometimes. With these visits I was able to build up a relationship with the women, and at the same time view how they lived their lives and find out more about what they liked to do.

According to Herbert (2000) participant observation takes time, in order to be able to observe a social group, and to be able to interact with this group, time will be of importance. It takes time for someone to really open up to me, but as soon as they noticed I really showed interest in them and made time I felt more accepted in their life and was involved more in certain happenings such as the visit to the shop, lunch and walks.

Before the fieldwork started I had really planned to take action and help out my informants with their Dutch, to be a language buddy, but during my research I found out that the women would rather spend time with me and have a good talk. I did start helping out the daughter of one of my informants with her Dutch, where the mother would sometimes also join in. This gave me the opportunity to be a part of the live of one of my informants, and showed me I was trusted.

Throughout the fieldwork period I continually kept making field-notes of every visit I made. These field-notes already provide a wonderful insight into all the information I gathered throughout my research.

ACTIVITIES

The activities I have conducted with my informants are part of the participant observation. In order to set the entire research scene it is important to consider all places where I would meet my informants or go to together with my informants. Among these places was one of the five Indian stores in Amstelveen: Asiatic.
I was at Meenakshi’s house around noon, we first had a lovely Indian lunch before we went to Sadhya’s apartment-building to also meet Rabhya there. We were already about 5 minutes late but luckily the other women were also a bit late. We then walked up to one of the many Indian stores in Amstelveen, this store was only a five minute walk from the apartment building. I bought some fresh Kaju Katli, my favourite Indian candy. On the way there, in the shop and on the way to the other shop we continually kept on chatting. Meenakshi did not take too many groceries so I asked her how she gets all the other things, but she says she normally goes again on the weekends with her husband so that he can carry the heavy groceries.

After visiting Asiatic we went to the Digros, a large Dutch supermarket-chain which is located another 5 to 10 minutes’ walk. We went there and to the Kruidvat, as two of the women needed something from there as well. Which shop they go to all depends on what they need on a particular day. Going grocery shopping together is something a few of my informants do together a lot, it needs to be done in any case, but they are making it more fun by going together.

Another place where quite a few of the Indian women come is the market in Amstelveen on Friday. It is a very large market, and many fresh vegetables can be found, this is also why Nabha loves to go here. Many different not very common vegetables can be bought here, and the prices are much better than in the stores. And one of the stalls has some good red and green chillies.

Bridging the Gap foundation had organized a republic day function on Sunday the 26th of January 2014. Bridging the Gap was founded in 2009, and has become a network and association for Dutch & Indian communities. Their key purpose is to “bridge the gap” between the Netherlands and India. Every few months the foundation organizes an event, either a party or a smaller event such as the republic day function (Bridging the Gap, 2014). These events are organized in Amstelveen, Amsterdam or even Den Haag. I first got to know of Bridging the Gap late 2013, as they organized the grand Diwali festival in Amstelveen which I visited. All of my informants know Bridging the Gap, and some even attend all events organized by this organization. Meenakshi who joined me there would not have gone to any event from Bridging the Gap normally, and this is also the case with many of the other women. On the
day itself there are a few speakers, dances from youth and a poem is recited. After the official program we had snacks and Meenakshi, Zeger and me spoke to some of the Indians there. In figure one is the poster which was on the facebook of Bridging the Gap, through which I got to know of the day itself.

One I was asked to help out Nabha when it was her daughter’s birthday. I helped by entertaining the children with face paint and animal-balloons when she heard I could do this. I was more than happy to assist, and spend the entire afternoon there. The other children were not all Indian children, about 4 different nationalities were present it seemed. It was a different environment for me to be in, seeing how the children of different nationalities played together, and gave me a small insight into their lives. Another great experience was going to a concert at P60 in Amstelveen with two of my informants, Meenakshi and Sameena. Me and Meenakshi first had a small dinner at the Indian deli in Amstelveen city centre, which I did not know was even there. After our dinner Sameena called us and we went for a glass of wine at one of the grand cafés opposite P60. P60 is concert building in the city centre of Amstelveen. When another Indian friend of Meenakshi had joined us to go with to the concert, we were off to see Tessa Rose Jackson, and all four of us really enjoyed.

At the end the fieldwork period three of my informants a friend of mine and myself went to a Karaoke-bar in Amsterdam, mostly because the Indian women had not been to a karaoke-bar ever before. In figure two you can see all of us sitting in the karaoke-bar. Before going there we had a glass of wine and a nice small (Dutch) dinner in a grand café nearby. At the bar there was quite loud music, but we all really enjoyed it. A few of us even went on the stage, and my informant’s sang very well. It should be noted that many of my informants very much enjoy going out and having a drink, some even go on a weekly basis.

Figure 3 Photo of me, a classmate and a few of the Indian expat women at the karaoke-bar.
INTERVIEWS
In total I have 21 recorded semi-structured interviews, one of which is a paired interview. During my interviews I tried to ask many open questions, as according to Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater (2012: 221) “open questions help elicit your informant’s perspective and allow for a more conversational exchange”. During my interviews I could see the positive effect of open questions, and this made the interviews more into a semi-formal conversations rather than a formal interview.
Most of the interviews were conducted at home, before or after lunch, as this was easiest in the women’s time schedule. Every interview I conducted was recorded, with the approval of the Indian expat wives. Some of the women I had already visited a few times before I actually interviewed them, these interviews I did not have to ask everything again, as I already knew some things about them.

MOVIE-DAY
In the end of March I had organized a movie-day at my own apartment in Uithoorn. This event was supposed to be a focus group, but in the end it was more a nice afternoon together with the women. On the day itself the women could chose a movie, which turned out to be Brick Lane. This movie is about a Bangladeshi woman who migrates to the UK and it tells about her experience to the Western life there. We were with only five women. There were not too many of my informants, because some of the women were ill or busy with their children and their school activities.
Everyone had brought snacks, which were stalled out on the table. Discussing the movie was a good way to introduce some of my informants to each other and analyse a movie together. The movie was very good, and was reacted too quite emotionally, the women felt that this woman was able to become more independent and stand up for herself finally.

PERSONAL REFLECTION
You can take the girl out of India but you cannot take India out of the girl seems a phrase which can be used here. Throughout almost all of my visits the women seemed to accept me and open up to me, but most of the time they would still treat me as a guest to their house. After a few visits to the same house this was not so much the case anymore, but it really did make me feel uncomfortable at times. Was this because I am younger, and a student or so, but could it also be because I am Dutch?
Furthermore during the research period many times I could not help but wondering if what I was doing was right. Because how do you know if you are doing the fieldwork as you are supposed to? I tried to do as much as possible, but it was difficult sometimes.
Also, my experience of three months in India continued to help me throughout this research. Almost every visit I was first asked why I did this research. I could then explain my personal motivation, simply because I loved India and its inhabitant’s diverse culture. It was more practical and feasible to stay in the Netherlands, and this research project gave me the opportunity to still focus on the Indian culture even though not being there physically. Furthermore I wanted to see what research opportunities are there in the Netherlands, and I have gotten a great opportunity with this research.

I have learned a lot from this experience, and most of all I am very grateful to get to know so many lovely women that really opened up to me. During the fieldwork period it became very clear to me that many of these women are not too different from me. Even though there were the obvious differences in for example culture and age, there were also many things we had in common such as the love for photography, movies, music, travelling and most important of all, just having fun!

**CHALLENGES**

*After a ten minute walk from the train station Sloterdijk I arrive at the apartment, and as I am waiting outside the door I can already smell the Indian spices, I think she must be cooking lunch already. An old man on the hallway tells me I must be at the wrong place, but I assure him I am at the right place. I remember feeling weird when he said this, why would this man immediately think I would not be a visitor of this Indian family? As I enter the apartment of Savita it appears she is already done with cooking and is just cleaning up. I am to sit on the couch and wait for her to finish, the kitchen needs to be clean as there is a guest.*

Even though the overall experience was great, there were some challenges, one of which is that very often I was seen as a guest, whilst I wanted to simply be seen as a friend. After a few visits this feeling would go away though, and I felt more comfortable. This was the advantage of conducting ethnographic research, where one is able to conduct research in one setting for a longer period.

Second, it was sometimes very difficult to meet with the women. The women who work are on a tight schedule, but even some of the non-working ladies were also very busy, in the school of their children with parents groups or activities for the children. All mothers seemed very engaged in this. Due to this there were quite some cancellations, which were rescheduled most of the time luckily. I always tried to immediately make a new appointment, and not to feel sad about having another cancellation. This was a challenge for me, rather than a problem.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I first about how I got into contact with the Indian expat women, through the snowballing effect with the help of informants especially. Furthermore various data collection methods were used to find out more about the lives of the Indian expat women. Participant observation and field notes of this proved to be very useful in this research. The semi-structured interviews give even more information, which added to the field notes created. I will now continue with the first data chapter, which focuses on the relationships my informants have, relationships in both India and the Netherlands.
CHAPTER 5 (RE)CREATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

Family and friends are very important in the Indian expat women’s life. Many of the Indian women who are in the Netherlands are still in contact with their family and relatives \(^6\) in India. Friends are also spoken to often, although a few of the women do not have so much contact with their friends in India anymore. This chapter focuses on the two formulated sub-questions concerning (transnational) relationships and feelings of belonging. In this chapter I will analyze my data on transnational relationships, and also on the new relationships formed here in the Netherlands. How are social networks created and how do the women meet new people and what do they do with them? Furthermore the women belong both here but also in India. When they left India to migrate to the Netherlands they had in the back of their mind that they would go back to India in the end. Not everything is just left there, they come here only for a certain period.

CONTACTS IN INDIA

All the Indian expat wives speak to their family and friends from India very often. Most of my informants speak to their parents or parents in law at least once or twice a week, and when they do they mostly speak with their mother. I will now first give a few examples of how often some of the Indian expat women speak to their family, and then a few examples of how often they speak to their friends. Salma speaks to her in-laws regularly, once in three days, and this is the same with her parents. Brothers and sisters are a completely different case, with them the contact is on and off, that contact is “whenever you feel like it” (Interview Salma). Salma also mentions that because her family is large it is sometimes also difficult to keep in close contact with everyone.

Salma has only been in the Netherlands for a half year when I spoke to her. She lives in a rented house in Amstelveen with her two children and husband. Her husband works in finance for Akzo Nobel. Salma herself used to be a teacher, but here in the Netherlands she only volunteers at the ISA. She is from Kolkata, Bengal, and goes to Dutch classes every week. In the beginning it was difficult coming here, but since she and her family are more adjusted they all enjoy it here.

Sameena who has a one year old son and has been in the Netherlands since 2009 has weekly contact with mother and family, while Meenakshi who has also been in the Netherlands for a longer time, eight years actually, still has daily contact with her mother. Meenakshi explained to me that this is because

\(^6\) Here I make a distinction between family and relatives as family is spoken of by my informants as the nuclear family and relatives are all the other family members such as aunts and cousins.
her mother is alone and she really misses her daughter. Her brother, who is in the UK, she also speaks to, however this is mostly through email. Meenakshi also has a father in law, which she does not speak to but her husband does, she says this is because she just does not have much to say to him.

When I first went to see Sita she had just come back from a visit in India, and even before I went there I was told by her friends that Sita would be a little homesick. She has lived in the Netherlands for about four years now, with her son and husband, and they are in regular contact with their family. But every time she comes back from a visit in India she will especially miss her family and friends from there. This is the case with more of my informants, but somehow they do not like to speak of this much.

Sita has been in the Netherlands for almost four years now. Her son has basically grown up here, and this was quite difficult for her in the beginning but now she got used to it. She is from Bangalore, and now lives in an apartment in Amstelveen. Sita has her master's in Indian classical dancing, and has just started classes here in Amstelveen for children in a school-hall. Her husband works for Abn Amro, in IT-software.

Nabha is also still very much in contact with her family whom are all over the world, but also with her friends, she speaks to them very often through various channels, however she always prefers a simple phone call. She never misses the birthday of one of her good friends, she will always call them.

When I visited Asha both her parents were there, and we all had lunch together. It was really good to see her parents there, and they seemed to be enjoying their stay in the Netherlands. When I asked how often she spoke to her family she replied the following:

“I speak to my mother-in-law almost daily and to my parents on a weekly basis even they are on whatsapp actually so we keep on pinging to each other. I send them the picks of the new recipes which I cook and tell what I made today” (Interview Asha).

Asha really is in close contact with both her own parents and her parents in law, and even keeps them updated on the new recipes which she learns through the internet. This way I feel she makes her parents a part of her daily life here in the Netherlands.

Anjali speaks to her family a lot, sometimes even every day, sometimes every two or three days, with Skype for example. She also speaks to her cousins a lot, and when I asked about this she said:

“Yes, cousins in India, not speaking to them as much but speak to them less. We speak to immediate family on What’s App, little groups we got. My aunt has three daughters my father
side of family so we have a little group each changing jokes and what is happening in each other’s life” (Interview Anjali).

She and her cousins are friends she says, and even though she is not speaking to them as much as when she was in India she does still speak to them. This happens on whatsapp a lot, with whatsapp groups, something which is quite common for the Indian expat wives. They have these whatsapp groups in which throughout the day someone is always posting something. For Anjali it is mostly jokes which come to the group, but it is still a way to be in contact with your family and/or friends and let them know what you are doing.

Anjali is still working, as she owns a research company in India together with a colleague. She works from home here in the Netherlands and her partner is in India. Her husband works as a CEO for a company in Amsterdam. Her daughter is in the ISA, and is currently in grade 7, she might study here but she can study where in the world she wants to study. Anjali herself enjoys Amsterdam as it is a comfortable place, but sometimes the work combined with the cleaning of the house and such is too much. They have also lived in Italy, but Anjali clearly would not want to live there.

When considering friends it can be seen that all of my informants still have many friends in India. Salma for example does not speak to her friends as much as she speaks to her family but they are constantly on whatsapp and they chat a lot. Her friends play an important role in her life.

“Today also I chatted with one of my friends because uh it’s in the corner of your mind, sometime if you have to go back to India and someone will be there because your parents will not be there for a long time, maybe after 10 years or so they will not be there but there should be someone, some attraction or some friends where you can fall on. So those friends are there with you. So thinking of them will make you feel oh we have someone to talk to, or if you’re not feeling good, you can just call them up” (Interview Salma)

It is important for Salma to stay in close contact with her friends so that she knows when she goes back to India they will still be there for her. It is continually in the back of her mind that she will go back to India sometime, which is the same for most of the Indian expat wives.

Devya still speaks to many of her friends in India, who are spread throughout the world.

“Yes of course they’re everywhere. Right from my nursery friends to my uh colleagues everywhere making contact. Even my teachers, my school-teachers yes” (Interview Devya).

Even friends from nursery and colleges, old colleagues, and even teachers from school she still speaks to. This is mostly through her phone, but also through Skype and such.
Devya is currently busy with her PhD in urbanization. She is an architect, who came here with her husband and son in 2011. Her husband is a chemical engineer, and her son is one of the two children of all my informants who goes to a Dutch school. They are originally from Bumbai, and their mother tongue is Marathi. They came to the Netherlands because they wanted a family life, as this was not possible in Bumbai as her husband then was never at home because of travelling to work for a long time each day.

Mithra has been in the Netherlands for quite a while, already 7 years in fact. She is still in much contact with her family and friends in India, and this contact has become more and more easy since whatsapp and facebook have come in existence. She will however always keep on calling her mother, as this it is even easier for her to keep in contact with her mother.

Mithra has been in the Netherlands for quite a while already, since 2006. She herself works as an IT consultant for Nuon, while her husband works in IT for Deloitte. They are both from Bombay, and have two young children of 3 and 5 years old. They now live in a house in Amstelveen Westwijk. It is difficult for Mithra to socialize here in the Netherlands because she is very busy with work and taking care of the children and the house. On weekends she does go out with friends and such.

Some of my informants are not so much in contact with their friends in India. Reasons for not being in contact so much with friends in India or other countries are being abroad for a few years already, travelling from country to country does not make it easier for the women to maintain relationships with their friends from India who are still in India or also abroad. Making new friends here in the Netherlands can in some cases also lessen the contact with friends in India, as they are building up a new social network here and are busy with that.

WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

The contact with both family and friends mostly happens through phone, but also with Skype, Email, Facebook, Face Time, Whatsapp, void or even G-talk are other ways to speak to their family, friends and relatives. It seems that their parents are spoken to on a more regular basis, but contact with friends is also still important for the women.

For Nabha especially facebook is very important when it comes to contact with friends in India.

“Pretty often, in the sense that uh one on one basis it’s not so much, but I think trough facebook pretty much all my friends know what I am up to. And the thing is I’m in touch with everyone,”
Like my entire graduation class from school, almost my entire class from college, from by BSC and from my masters” (Interview Nabha).

Facebook is not only good for the contact itself, but it provides her a way to be in touch with ‘everyone’, all the friends she has gained throughout her life.

Facebook is not only a way to communicate with and update your friends and family abroad, however it is also a way of communicating in the Netherlands. As Miller states it “Facebook really is quite literally a social network” (Miller, 2013:217). He further explains this by saying that the emphasis and importance of facebook lies in the ability to reconstruct relationships, especially with relatives and/or friends who live further away due to for example increasing mobility (Miller, 2013). Furthermore, facebook does not create new social networks, it simply gives people a means to expand it (Miller, 2011).

Most of the women maintain in close contact with their relatives at home, their parents but also with brothers and sisters, cousins and friends. Facebook is one of the ways through which they show their family and friends in India what they are up to, with the use of pictures and messages they post on facebook. Not all the family is on facebook of course, it is more the siblings, cousins and friends that are there.

The women are also in contact with each other through facebook, using it as a social network for themselves. Facebook and phones (calling and/or whatsapp) are the main ‘tools‘ through which the Indian expat women plan things to do together.

Currently there are also many Dutch facebook groups of which my informants are members. These groups include Indian Expats in Netherlands, Expat moms in Amsterdam and a few more. Through these groups they interact with others, and get to know more about what other expats or more specifically Indian expats are doing or looking for.

CONTACTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands the women have made new social contacts, creating social networks with mostly other Indian expat wives or expat wives from a different country. Some of the women do have Dutch contacts too but not a lot.

Only two or three of the women I have spoken to actually have Dutch friends, it is very uncommon for them to have much contact with Dutch people other than with neighbors or colleagues at work. Reasons for this given by my informants was that they simply do not meet many Dutch people.

Sometimes good contact is established, with the neighbors for example, as is the case with Sayeeda and Nandini. Both Sita and Nandini could count on their neighbors at all times, and would always go to them
for example Dutch letters. Or when they need assistance with something else, the neighbors are always very friendly.

Nandini currently lives in Hilversum with her husband, daughter and son. They are from Bangalore. Her husband works for Deloitte. It is her wish to work part-time in a school, which she hopes will be possible when her son is a bit older.

Devya was the only women to actually have a Dutch friend before arrival in the Netherlands, as they met while studying in Great Britain. This woman helped her get acquainted in the Netherlands, and process all the changes. She said the following:

“…fortunate, I got my very first friend here, she’s Dutch, we studied together at the university of Bath, and uh so she was my very first contact point before I came here. I asked her like what are the options I have, how is it, and all she asked when I first came, was how long I would be here, and accordingly everything would change. And she really helped me in that process. And then after coming here I first uh, I met friends through the school, AICS, and there I got these contacts of uh the Marathi-speaking community. Then we came to hear there are many, and now I have a bunch of friends” (Interview Devya).

For Devya having a friend before coming to the Netherlands made coming here easier. It might have made her feel more like she belonged here, as she already had a friend who knew what to do. It also seemed to increase to her own happiness, as she was assisted in the process of adjusting and did not have to figure everything out by herself.

MEETING NEW PEOPLE

Devya was in her own words ‘fortunate’ to already have a Dutch contact before coming here, but this was not the case with the other women. Another way how Devya met her other friends and contacts in the Netherlands was through the school of her son. This was something which many of the Indian expat women have in common, as through the International school it is possible to meet other expats, and especially also to meet other Indian expats.

When I asked how Anathi met her friends in the Netherlands she answered in the following way:

“All through the school (ISA)... This year Lakshmi and I, we are representatives for the Indian community at school. It’s the school basically which is another thing why an International school would be of benefit to us and the family and also the children. Because you really get to integrate in the Indian community so very quickly, everybody there understands what you are going through because they have done it and they have gone through it themselves so it’s just a very quick way of getting into the community and feel at home” (Interview Anathi).
According to Anathi, school is not only an important place to meet other expats, Indian or from another country, it is where you meet the Indian community, through which you are then able to integrate, as they understand what you are going when you have just arrived in the Netherlands. She and her friend are now even the Indian community representatives. They assist the new Indians coming to the school in the process of adjusting and getting to know Amsterdam for example. Every time something needs to be organized for some event they are the ones organizing the part for the Indian community. When I was at the school they were just busy with decorating big boards, for an event the next day. More than 8 Indian mothers were present to help them out, and they told me this was normal for them.

Besides meeting new people through the schools of their children, new people can also be met through various other ways. The several Indian associations such as the Kannada or Marathi associations have introduced some of my informants to each other, as was the case with Sita and Meenakshi. Meenakshi does not have children, and therefore does not have the opportunity to meet new people at an international school. Sita has a four year old son however, and lives in an apartment building in Amstelveen, near Kronenburg. Surprisingly Meenakshi and Sita both lived in the same apartment building for already one year before meeting each other at one of the Kannada Association events.

S: “And how, how did you meet all the other Indian Ladies here?“.
M: “Uhh a couple of them are living in my own building so I bumped into them. And we made a group, and I bumped into Sadhya on the road one morning. And then we knew each other from the group because she used to come. And then we got to know each other“.
S: “Through the Potluck lunches”?  
M: “Yeah Potluck lunches. We got to know more about each other. And sometimes we have nights out. It’s more fun. And uh I think in nature, we have the similar characteristic nature, that outgoing nature (Interview Meenakshi)“.

Besides the Kannada association Meenakshi spoke to me of two other ways to get to know people, the first is by simply bumping into someone on the road. This can actually make it possible to meet someone who is very similar to you. The second way she mentioned is with the Potluck lunches with the ‘group’. Almost all the Indian women I have met regularly organize or go to Potluck lunches. At these lunches each of the women brings some homemade food, and they all eat and chat together. Most of the time this is always the same small group, and every lunch the ladies can bring new Indian women they have met. At one point Sita did also invite me to come to one of the Potluck lunches, but a day before the actual lunch I was uninvited because a few of the women coming there were not too comfortable having me there.
Every time I sat on metro 51 from the VU University back home to Uithoorn between three and four in the afternoon there would be at least 5 Indian children with their mothers too. I wondered where they were coming from, and figured that there must be an international school somewhere close. Already during my first house visit this thought was confirmed, these women most probably came from the AICS (derived from field notes).

Schooling seems to be one of the most important ways to meet new people for the Indian expat wives with children. But what schooling do the children of the Indian expat wives go to?

The AICS is the Amsterdam International Community School, which is located in Amsterdam South. The tuition fees for this school are relatively lower than for the two other international schools in this area where many of the expat wives children go to. These other schools are the British School of Amsterdam (BSA) and the International School of Amsterdam (ISA), which are both private and have significantly higher tuition fees (rising up to €20,000). During my research I came to find out the children who go to BSA or ISA have parents who both work, or one of the parents has quite a higher income than those parents whose children go to AICS.

It should be noted that many of the company’s where the Indian expat wives husband’s work pay for their children to go to one of these International schools, however some company’s do not.

Out of all the Indian women I have met only two women who send their children to Dutch schools, Aisha and Devya.

Aisha is from Jaipur, and has been in the Netherlands for at least a year now. She owns her own beauty salon here in the Netherlands, which she runs from her home. She lives in Amstelveen together with her husband and daughter. Her husband works for ING. Unfortunately her 1,5 year old son is not with them, as he currently lives with her mother in law, which is very difficult for Aisha.

Aisha’s reason for sending her daughter to the Dutch school is that they are planning on staying here in the Netherlands. She and her husband feel it is important for her daughter to learn the local language, while she is not capable of speaking much in Dutch yet herself. Her husband does speak some Dutch though, as he has lived here longer than her.

Devya reason to put her son in a Dutch school is that he can have more friends in the surroundings of where they live in Amstelveen. They used to go to the park, but when he played with the kids there they could not understand each other. As an expat-child he will not have life-long friends because they might
move again, but now he does get an opportunity to bond with other children, at AICS Devya feels this is more difficult since there are only expat children there.

**ALTERNATIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM**

In India every woman has her own family support system, but here in the Netherlands this system is not there. As mentioned before, most of the women create new social networks here but what is interesting to see it that these networks can sometimes developed into their alternative family support system. Only four of my informants do not have children, all the other women all have one or two children.

When in India many of the women lived in the same city or even the same house as their parents in law or parents. The child(ren) could easily go to their grandmothers, giving their mothers free time to go to work or spend time with friends or undertake other activities. In the Netherlands when the mothers want to leave the house they always have to make sure the husband is home to take care of the child(ren), or the children need to be in school for example.

Quite a few of the Indian women I have spoken to really enjoy going out, and partying in Amsterdam, they make sure their husband will stay at home, and then go out with (mostly female) friends. But there are also those women who have build up such a close social network that they can always ask friends to watch after their child(ren) and then go out together with their husbands.

In some cases a sort of alternative support system is created for Indian people who come from the same area.

For Anjali friends play a large role in her life. When I asked her about it she even spoke of a support system here.

*Anjali: “The fact is that we also have very nice friends here that make big difference.”*

*Interview Anjali.*

For Anjali friends here are her support system. She feels very much appreciated when someone comes out to help them, and this makes a difference in her life. This is why she enjoys living here. She herself is
also there for others, for example one of her friends just had a surgery and she and some other mothers now everyday pick up her daughter to go to school.

Devya and her family are Maharastran, she spoke to me about the Maharastran Mandal in the Netherlands.

“...basic idea is to bring these people, the Marathi speaking people together and create a support system for them. You know we are not to stay here for good but we are here for some specific period as a transfer, as an expat” (Interview Devya).

Devya really feels the association is a way to create a kind of support system in the Netherlands. It seems to me that this is a good way to help out others, knowing that the new expats are going through the same issues upon arrival in the Netherlands.

There are many more of these associations in the Netherlands, such as the Kannada association, in which Meenakshi, Maya, Savita and Sumita are active. Twice a year this association has meetings where they celebrate certain festivals from their own region, or an Indian festival such as Diwali. During these meetings there is the local Kannada music, dances and according to Meenakshi most importantly it is also a nice way to get to know new people and have nice food.

However, not all the women have found an alternative for their family support system in India. For example Anathi, who has lived all over the world with her family, told me she and her husband have not been out together since the birth of their first child. They simply don’t want to leave their children alone with someone they don’t know very well, even though they do have good friends here.

The family support system can allow for the women to feel more at home, more at ease, and maybe also more like they belong here. I will now speak more about how the women feel they belong.

FEELINGS OF BELONGING

As I said before and want to make clear again, people can belong in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment. All of the Indian expat women I have met have followed their husband abroad. This however does not mean that they did not want to come here, because most of the women did want to come here. Only one out of almost 30 of my informants told me she initially did not want to come here, but after being here for a few weeks she too started to enjoy life here. When I asked one of the Indian ladies where she felt she belonged she said she belonged anywhere where her husband
would be. A few others followed her in this answer, responding they belong wherever their husband and family are.

Many of the other woman answered they belonged in India, or that their heart was in India. The women do enjoy living here for the time being, or for a few more years at least, but in the end they know they will go back to India. This is not the case for all my informants though, some might have to go to another country, and will continue to live the expat life. And other might just go back to India after experiencing living abroad for a year or two or so in the Netherlands. For many it is never certain when and where they will move, but one month they could still be living here, and the other month they could have already left the country for another job elsewhere. There are also those women that would like to stay here, about a handful of the women I have encountered during my research want to settle here in the Netherlands.

Yuval-Davis argued that sense of belonging is not the same for everyone, however in Indian culture family is of much importance, and from my fieldwork I can say that almost all the women do have one thing in common. Most of the women will go back to India, to work, to settle, or more importantly, to take care of their parents in law and/or parents. Whenever they are in need of assistance of them, they will immediately go there. Most of the women feel this is what they need to do, and do not see this as an obligation. When I asked if the women saw this as an obligation this was mostly not the case. In many cases the parents in law and/or parents will also live with the expats when they return to India.

“Uh, it’s like uh financially we don’t have to do much about our parents. Though we support my parents also, my in-laws also. Though they don’t need that much, but yeah mentally and everything we have to uh do. In India you have so many help and relatives are nearby if you need any help they will be always there to help you”... “If you are there, if my husband was working there in Kolkata probably my, his parents will be staying with me. The tradition is like that”. “And uh coming and staying with us probably they don’t want to leave their locality and stay with us. Their own place. So yah. But uh yah they will probably be staying with us for a few months and we will stay with them or a few days”. (Interview Salma 27-2)

In the case of Salma it is evident that the parents or parents in law do not always want to go live with their children because they do not want to leave the area they live in. It is more the case that they will visit them for a longer period of time. Family remains and is very important in the lives of the Indian expat wives.
Migrating to the Netherlands has changed the lives of all the Indian expat women. For some the influence is more than for others, but in overall the women have gotten much more independent. Suddenly they are allowed to go out at night, walk alone over the streets, When I asked Meenakshi if her identity has changed when she came to the Netherlands she answered the following:

“Of course there’s a very very major difference. Because India is a conservative country and you don’t get to move around a lot freely. Cause uh we have to you know take care of everything there. So that my father in law doesn’t get hurt sentimentally or whatever. Here I have no restrictions. I can be myself. And have fun. I don’t have to feel guilty about anything. That’s the major change. So I would say yes. There’s a lot of identity change. But now when you think about it when I go back to India I have written my own self. I’m still myself, I don’t change a lot now. Because earlier I used to think that I should up dress up in a different way just to please men but not anymore. I’ve changed in that way. And even my parents and everyone back home are, you know. They’ve made their peace with it. Because they know I’ve changed. And they don’t expect me to follow the rules anymore. So they know that I have changed. Yah it’s a liberating feeling”.

(Interview Meenakshi)

What I love about this quote is that is put into words very well how many of the women feel about living in the Netherlands. The women feel liberated living here, and they still do are themselves, but they have changed themselves. The people at home do notice this change, but this is commonly accepted. The women also feel more confident about themselves here, which might be because of the independence. Salma added to that saying she is enjoying her freedom here, there is good public transport and the city is completely safe to walk. This gives her many opportunities. The option of good and safe public transport, and that the women are able to walk by themselves safely gives them a feelings they sometimes never had in India. Living here gives the women freedom of mobility.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I spoke of many issues, first of all the women are all in contact with family and friends in India or elsewhere in the world. Facebook, Skype and phones have made it easy for the women to communicate with them. Here in the Netherlands the women are mostly in contact with other Indians, as they do not get the opportunity to meet many Dutch. Through the international schools, neighborhood or potluck lunches they meet other women, and build up new relationships. These new relationships allow them to build up a new social support system, replacing the family supporting
system which they normally had in India. Most of the women do feel happy here, but feel they belong in India. The freedom here is what makes them feel at ease, and this also causes their identity to change somewhat in some cases. The women can sometimes feel liberated, and gain more independence.
CHAPTER 6 MAKING A LIFE AS AN EXPAT WIFE

The migration is a life changing experience for the women, sometimes leaving their job, the opportunity of a job or even their study. Most of the women are even highly educated. This chapter is about the lives of the Indian expat wives in the Netherlands, their background in education and work plays a large role in this. I will also speak about what they do here in their daily lives.

It should be noted that all the women visit India every year or every two years. This depends on school-holidays if they have children, and if their husband can get free from work. These visits are most of the time in the Dutch winter, as most of the women do not especially enjoy the cold weather here. Some of the women have to go in the Dutch summer though, as the school-holiday will allow them to go for a longer period.

WORK & EDUCATION

All the women spoken to during the research stated that they migrated to the Netherlands because of their husband’s job. It was either for a new job, relocation or a promotion which was only possible in the Netherlands at the time. Some of the women were involved in the decision for coming to this country, however some were not involved in the decision. Those women would follow their husband anywhere and did not have too much of a choice of where they will go. The latter was noticed mostly with women who are in an arranged marriage, which includes almost half of my informants.

Upon arrival in the Netherlands some of the women first decide to have a break, of about a year or two. A couple of my informants are currently still in this ‘break’ and are okay with that. But many of the women immediately tried to find a job, and this was proven to be very difficult. It should be noted that almost every woman I have spoken to previously used to have a job, before coming here, or before their marriage. This chapter will contain some of the stories I have heard of trying to find a job, some of the stories are successful, while others are not.

WORKING WOMEN

Sameena arrived in the Netherlands in 2011, and since then has been trying to find work through recruitment agencies, with a one-and-a-half-year break because of her son. Trying to find a job in the Netherlands is very difficult, many times she was told she needed to speak Dutch fluently. Other difficulties Sameena came across with was that when she finally did think she found something, she was told not to have enough work experience, whilst she had already worked for more than four years in India. She remained persistent however, and now that her son is at such an age to be able to go to
... daycare she decided to try again. Then Sameena’s job search has finally proven successful, as currently she is doing a traineeship in Finance. Even though this is a traineeship and not a fulltime job already she felt happy.

Shobita’s story is yet again different, working in India for an international company, she wanted to shift to the Netherlands to live with her husband. When the company had found her a suitable project she could come to the Netherlands, and she is currently still working there.

*Shobita has been in the Netherlands for almost three years now and lives in Amsterdam with her husband. She came to the Netherlands because her husband worked here, but she made sure to be relocated here by the company she works for in India. She now works in banking at Bijlmer Arena. She is originally from Uttar Pradesh.*

Mithra works in software three days a week and takes care of her children and manages the household. As her husband also works and comes home late she is responsible for the picking up of the children, and taking care of the house.

Even though the women are not the main breadwinners it can be seen that these women seem more focused on staying here for the long term. And thereby also want to earn for the household. Other reasons for working are simply to keep themselves busy, as otherwise they would not know what to do. Migrating to a different country does not mean it is necessary to stop working, options are always there. As Geist & McManus pointed out, it is often the wife who is considered the ‘tied mover’. However in the case of the Indian expat wives, the migration might have come on the expense of the job in India or elsewhere, but this is does not necessarily mean it means the end of the wife’s career.

**NON WORKING WOMEN**

Devya stated the following:

“.. but generally women, they leave their career behind, really a good career behind and come here to a strange country and all they do is to raise their children properly. It’s not that they are not talented but they don’t get the opportunities at the right moment. And uh again they don’t know exactly how long they are going to stay here. And while they would study the language and do all the other thing, for example if I am a doctor then I cannot practice here in NL because I have to go through several examinations in Dutch” (Interview Devya)
Sadhy and Nabha both had good jobs before coming to the Netherlands. Sadhya used to work in a bank in the United Kingdom and was doing quite well.

_Sadhy has been in the Netherlands for a few years now, but she might have to go to Canada later this year because of her husband’s job. She is originally from Bumbai, and has a Post-Grad in Accounting. She currently lives in Amstelveen, and has just finished an intensive Dutch course at the Volksuniversiteit in Amstelveen._

Nabha had her own film-company in India and taught one day a week. Both had to give up their good jobs, for their husband’s jobs. Both women, who are friends, have tried to find a new job when they first arrived here, but were unsuccessful in their search. Nabha told me that the organizations would give different reasons for not hiring her, such as ‘we only hire people from a certain area in Amsterdam’, or that she didn’t speak Dutch or she would not even get a proper answer as to why she was not hired. After being rejected many times one day she decided she would just make the most out of living here, and started exploring all of the Netherlands with her public transport card provided by her husband’s company in the first year. Nabha now spends her days waking up early morning, preparing breakfast and lunch for her husband and daughter, go for a walk, with or without the dog she walks a few days a week and then go off to a museum, or exhibition or so until her daughter needs to be fetched from school. Nabha also manages the household on her own, but this is not her priority.

Salma also had to quit her job, when they migrated to the Netherlands. She used to teach at a school, and says she is assured of the same job when she will return to India. This is not always the case of course, but some of the women do state it is easier to find a job again when returning to India. Salma is only here for half a year now, and has not attempted to find a job. She is very involved in her children’s school and volunteers there quite often. She is also taking Dutch lessons and managing the household, which was rather difficult in the beginning as she was not at all used to this. This accounts for most of the women I have spoken to, as in India they all had maids who came to the house on a daily basis.

Meenakshi had just finished her masters and Asha was still busy with her masters when they married their current husbands and moved to the Netherlands, within only half a year. Both still do have the aspiration to study further, however both told me this was probably only possible in India. In the Netherlands it is too expensive to study further without having the Dutch passport, and in India they could easily start again.
During my research I realized that being a housewife does not mean that the woman are not busy. At first I thought the woman kept themselves so busy just to not think of India and their family in India too much, but after meeting so many different women with different things to keep themselves busy it seemed this was not the case. The women keep this busy in order to live their life to the fullest, and enjoy whatever time they have here.

The woman are especially involved in their children’s life, arranging performances at Indian events organized by the organizing Bridging the Gap, by for example making a choreography and sewing together outfits for the children. Most of the women who have children are also very involved in their children’s school. This is mostly the case with the children who go to the International School of Amsterdam (ISA) and the Amsterdam International Community School (AICS). When I had the opportunity to visit ISA I was there the day before ISA’s Global Village project, which meant that there were more than 10 Indian moms present at the time, preparing for the next day, making posters and such, and also to practice the choreography later on. This is something the women always do, and they spend a lot of time at the school organizing things for the children with the other moms. However they do not only organize things for the children, there are also many clubs such as the sewing club or book club, where the parents (mostly mothers) come together every week to spend time with each other and have fun.

Volunteering is also popular amongst some of the woman. Upon arrival in the Netherlands 8 years ago Meenakshi started working in a sales related company, but quit there after three months as she did not enjoy the work. After this Meenakshi did try for another job but when this did not work out decided to ‘stick’ with volunteer work.

“So I decided I would just stick with the volunteering work and that keeps me flexible really. Because right now I really don’t need money for myself. I mean we, my husband earns enough for both of us. But I just wanted to keep myself busy. So you know. My mind won’t wonder off. But I can also do that with the volunteer work so I don’t really need to work for money” (Interview Meenakshi).

Volunteer work can also be inside the school for the children, in an interview with Salma it became clear that the school regularly ask for volunteers to help out with certain events. Another of my informants,
Shobitha who works fulltime in banking had the opportunity to shift to the Netherlands. Being here for 1,5 years now, she decided to also do volunteer work, in order to help the society, and in her free time do something that matters.

Sita, who is a certified Indian classical dancer, decided she wanted to do something with this here in the Netherlands. She decided to give classes in Indian classical dance to children. After some research she found an appropriate hall just around the corner of her house, and now every Friday afternoon she has about 10 girls coming to learn Indian classical dance. The money earned with for the classes all go to the rent of the hall, so it is more or less break-even.

**Daily lives**

I have already discussed some of the things the women do in their daily lives such as volunteering in the schools of their children, or exploring the country.

One of the things I noticed when I asked the women about their daily lives here was that they all make breakfast for their husband in the morning, and if they have children also for them. They also make lunch which can be packed and taken with.

Sameena has a son who is only one year old and when I asked her what her life in the Netherlands looks like she answered:

> “Right now it is very different I think one year back if you had asked me answer should have been very different. Now that he is here it always revolves around him now that’s the problem sometimes..” (Interview Sameena)

Since her son was born her life has started to revolve around her son which is sometimes difficult for her. She does still try to go out also and meet with friends, but this is not always possible. Now that she has found a traineeship he goes to daycare.

When I asked Salma why she did not work here, and what she did in her daily life over here she answered:

> “But uh, uhm I don’t really have that much of time to devote for uhm work because at times the week is like that 2/3 days I have to go out continuously to probably work at school or any other uh thing I have, appointment I have outside. And I’m learning Dutch also. So after coming back home I find that oh so much things to do. Like the house is in a mess or something. It’s so much. And that becomes a pressure on me” (Interview Salma).
In her daily life Salma is already very busy, with the volunteering at school, and other appointments. Since she is learning Dutch this also takes up much of her time. She seems really motivated, and is only here for half a year now, I think that when she is here for longer she will have more time to devote to herself.

Asha has a similar schedule of Sameena and Salma.

“..I get up and I cook for my husband, I mean he takes his lunch box to office so I cook for him and then after that I do the daily course like cleaning stuff, and then I prepare lunch for myself and after that I meet my friends and then in the evening I go for a walk”(Interview Asha).

This would be an average day for Asha, but of course not every day is the same. The evening walk is also together with friends sometimes, and when she comes home from the walk she prepares dinner. When her husband comes home from work they have their dinner together, and then retire in front of the television or so. What Asha also loves to do is practicing music, she sings almost an hour every day.

For all of the women life here is very different from life in India. When I asked Anjali about this she told me about dinner time in India.

“Here life is very different. Here you have to go to Albert Heijn buy groceries and vegetables and garments cook and clean and do all the things that you never did in India and I actually laughed because in India every day at work I would get a call at 6 o’clock from the guy who used to cook in the house and he would call to ask what should I make for dinner” (Interview Anjali).

In India she never used to have to cook herself, she had people living in the house who would do all the things such as doing the groceries, cooking and cleaning. Even though quite a few of the other women told me they also had maids who would do the cooking and such. It was a completely different lifestyle.

Meenakshi was expected to do the groceries in India but here in the Netherlands she has more freedom.

“But here I get to do a lot of different things. I go out I go to museums I go for long walks...You don’t get to do all those things in India because uh it’s a lot of safety hazards. You need someone constantly to be with you. I mean earlier, but now I’m stronger so I don’t need anyone to be with me” (Interview Meenakshi).

More freedom to Meenakshi means she gets to do many different things than what she was used to in India. She even feels stronger because of that and this is the same for more of the women.

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7 A supermarket in the Netherlands.
Conclusion

Live is at times rather insecure for many of the women, as even now being in the Netherlands nothing is very sure for most of the women, it can be that within one month they would have to pack everything and go, go back to India or any other country in the world. The women are highly educated expat women. Some of the women did have a job before coming here, but others did not. All the women I have met try to make something out of their new life here, some focusing more on their children and some focusing more on themselves. The daily lives of the women differ, but in overall they take care of their husband and children if they have children, but when they are not around they take time for themselves. Living in the Netherlands gives them the opportunity for experiencing new things, doing things they want to do and simply do something they love.
CHAPTER 7 FINAL CONCLUSION

Not one of the Indian women I have met during my fieldwork is the same, and each of these beautiful women has a very interesting personal story. Most of the Indian expat wives of this research seem to be happy with their life, or at least content with living here. The migration itself has given them some new kind of freedom which they did not experience in India.

Gender in migration, feelings of belonging and transnationalism are important in this research, I will now show why. The migration of the Indian expat women is a gendered experience, the women migrate as a dependent spouse. Cooke (2001) suggests that dependent spouses give up on their own career to support their partner’s career. In this research it has become clear that this is indeed the case for many Indian expat women.

People can belong in many different ways, it is a way of identifying yourself and it is a dynamic process (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Even though the women are in the Netherlands and living here now and they feel good about that they still feel that eventually they will return to India as that is where they belong.

Being in the Netherlands does not mean the women are not in much contact with their family and friends from India, in my research I noticed that all the women are still in regular contact with them. The women migrate to the Netherlands, but their involvement in India has not stopped. Many even still have houses or apartments there, which their family is taking care of.

The research question formulated in this thesis is: “In what way is the identity and life of the Indian expat wives influenced by their migration to the Netherlands and are they really tied migrants?”

To answer this question I argue that migrant (expat) wives are generally conceived as ‘tied’ migrants, which means that they are perceived as dependent wives, who had to give up their career and leave a lot behind. In this way they have experiences some loss. But in my study I show that there is another side to the lives of the Indian expat wives in the Netherlands. The women experience freedom in several ways, but mostly in personal development, mobility and social relations.

The sub-questions formed to support the research question are:

- How and with whom do these women maintain (transnational) relationships?
- How do these women experience feelings of belonging? Do they feel they belong in the Netherlands?
In answering the first sub-question it can be seen that the women maintain many transnational relationships with family and friends from India. But the women also make many new social relationships, and build up new social networks which sometimes even develop into support systems. In answering the second sub-question, my research shows that the women feel they belong in India eventually or anywhere as long as they are with their husband. Here in the Netherlands they do feel at their place for the time being, and they do feel good about living here.

As I said before, this thesis is a part of a larger research project focusing on Indian highly skilled migrants and re-migrants. My research has given a better insight into what the Indian highly skilled migrant’s wives experience in the Netherlands. The wife can be seen as ‘tied’ in many different ways, but there is also a liberating dimension. The women are here on the basis of their husband’s work, their sponsor, but on the other hand when in the Netherlands the women can experience an untying process. At first it might be difficult, but after a little while the women seem rather happy living in the Netherlands, and make the most of out their time here. Many of the women did have to leave behind their job or education, but for some there are new opportunities here in the Netherlands. The women undergo personal development and have more freedom that they were used to. Furthermore they have the opportunity to explore new social contacts, creating new social networks, but friends and family in India are also still spoken to on a regular basis. Besides that the women can do what they enjoy to do. It seems to me that in overall the women are experiencing happy lives here in the Netherlands!
APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INDIAN EXPAT WOMEN

Basic Information

- Name
- What is your religion?
- What is your caste?
- From where in India?
- Why have you moved to the Netherlands?
- Do you work here? If not, what do you do?
- What does your husband do?
- Do you have children?
  - What language do you speak with them?
  - To what kind of school does your child go international or Dutch school?
  - Why did you make this decision?

Education

- Did you study before you came to the NL?
- What did you study for?
- Work experience
- Have you worked before you came here?
- Have you worked in the Netherlands or are you still working?
  - If the answer is yes, what kind of job is/was it?
  - Do you enjoy working here?
  - Do you work fulltime or part-time?

  - If the answer is no, have you tried finding work?
    - What kind of work have you been looking for?
    - Why have you not been able to find a job you think?
    - Would you still like to find a job now?
- What about volunteer work, have you tried this?
Questions relating to identity

- What are your roles in life?
  - What other roles would you like to have?
- What does it mean for you to be a wife?
- What does it mean for you to be a woman?
- How do you feel about being an (Indian) woman?
- How does your family see you?
- Obligations of Indian women
- Challenges in motherhood in the Netherlands.
- Dutch medical system.
- Marriage
- Was your marriage an arranged marriage or a love-marriage?
- What kind of relationship do you have with your husband?
- Did you have a say in coming to the NL?

Sub question 1. How and with whom do these women maintain transnational relationships?

Family in India

- Is all your family in India?
- Do you have much contact with family and friends in India?
  - How often do you have contact with people in India or elsewhere?
  - How do you communicate with family and friends in India?
- How often do you still visit India?
  - Do you wish you could go more?
- Do you send money to India?
  - To whom do you send the money? And where is it used for?
- Are you still involved in Indian Politics?
  - If yes, how does this work?

Friends

- What role do friends play in your life?
- What about friends in India, how often are you in contact with them and how?
What about friends in the Netherlands, do you have local (Dutch) friends? Or more Indian friends? Or from other cultures?

How do you meet new people here?

How do you maintain contact with them

Sub question 2. How do these women experience feelings of belonging? Do they feel they belong in the Netherlands?

Have you also lived in other countries than India before you came here?
  - If yes, how did you feel there?

How do you feel about living in the Netherlands?

Life in the Netherlands

Could you describe an average day of your life here?

What do you like to do for fun here?

Life in India

Could you describe an average day of your life there?

What do you like to do for fun there?

Would you feel more comfortable living in India or in the Netherlands?
  - Why would you rather be in the Netherlands?
  - Why would you rather be in India?

What about your house, have you furnished it or is it furnished by the landlord?

Does your house feel like home?

Dutch policies & practices

What kind of visa do you have?

How did you obtain this visa?

Integration

Have you tried to integrate into the Dutch society?
  - Do you know how to speak & write Dutch?
  - Inburgeringsexam?
  - Other nationality than Indian?
  - Dutch passport?
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