

**Auto/ethnographical métissage of ho[me] stories in the hyphens: a living
pedagogy of Indo-Canadian women's be/coming and be/longing**

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Abstract

I have been talking to others about how I balance Canadian culture with my ancestral culture, about why my survival and self-esteem demand I hold on to both and about how, despite my efforts, I still feel isolated from both cultures at times.

Palmer, 1997, p.vi

My auto/ethnographical journey stems from my experience where, as an I-m-migrant, I feel like I live in the hy-phens negotiating between “a here, a there *and* an elsewhere” (Trinh, 2011), straddling cultures, homelands, I-identities, and languages. This identity crisis has made me quest/ion how other i-m-migrant women, especially the Indo-Canadian women in Ottawa, navigate their hyphe-nated existence(s) with/in these liminal spaces which are both home and not-home. As both insider and outsider, I engaged in complicated conversations with Indo-Canadian women to hear about their live(d) experiences and to understand the process of my / our be/com/ing’ and be/long/ing in these hybrid spaces. The questions that guided me through this inquiry are: How do Indo-Canadian women re-produce and re-create this notion called home? What are some of influences of (im)migration on this notion of ho[me]? How do they navigate and per/form their hyphenated *currere* with/in these hybrid liminal spaces which are both home and not-home? What do these performances dis/close about the women’s understanding of their lives in the hyphens? Through a post-colonial, feminist perspective, and drawing from qualitative research methodologies such as “autoethnography” (Ellis, 2003), “bricolage” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kincheloe, 2001), “narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013), and “found poetry” (Butler-Kisber, 2010), I perform a “literary métissage” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009) of the live(d) narratives of women who, like me, are members of the Indo-Canadian diaspora. I juxtapose our conversations with artifacts, photographs, recipes, and literary pieces that depict our hyphe-nation(s). From an educational perspective, I hope that my “performance [auto]ethnography” (Alexander, 2000) of ho[me]stories of Indo-Canadian women will become a “living pedagogy” and have “the potential to become trans/formative curriculum inquiry” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009), which might help to de/construct the stereotypical image of the “universal Indian woman” (Sharma, 2009).

Acknowledgements – Aabhar | आभार

I had a dream...

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For my parents

Sheetala and Gurudatt Balsawer

for all the lived stories

&

for my niece

Leena-Rose

for stories waiting to be unraveled



A life refers to the biographical experiences of a named person.

A person is a cultural creation.

Denzin, 2013, p. 130.

Experience can only be studied through performance

Bruner, 1986, p. 6.

Memory, however, is volatile, slippery;

we tie it down, as the classical orators did, by linking it to places, sites

Behar, 1996, p. 81.

*To recall that past by way of memory traces is to render it 'another culture' in an
ever receding palimpsest of overlapping cultures, of which past, present and future
are merely points of perspective*

Russell, 1999, p. 19.

Life Writing is a way of knowing and being

Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, Sinner, 2012, p. xx

Preamble - Prastaavnaa | प्रस्तावना

*The one question I hear very often in Canada is: “Where are you from?”
When I reply that I am from Bombay, India originally, some people tell me:
“You are not like the other Indians (or other Indian women) I know!”
On the other hand, some people from India have actually said to me: “You
don’t look Indian at all! Maybe your parents moved here when you
were very young.”*

*Some people at work and at the University sometimes ask me: “Did you
come here and learn to speak English?”¹
Some of my classmates and colleagues often inquire: “Are you planning to
go back ‘home’ after your studies?”*

Navigating a hyphe-nated currere

My auto/ethnographical inquiry stems from the existential dilemma about my identity, and the notion of *home* I have faced since moving to Canada. A sense of belonging in Canada “is elusive for those of us who share part of our lives here” writes Hazelle Palmer (1997, p.v) in the anthology “...but where are you really from?” As an immigrant (*I-M-migrant*), I feel like I live in the hyphens, or the liminal “third space” (Bhabha, 1987/1990) where I straddle cultures, homelands, identities, and languages. According to Stuart Hall (1990) “we should think of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p.222). People here ask me where I am from, or, if I am new to Canada, especially when they see me in a sari or a salwar-kameez (*chemise*). I feel like a

¹ India is a former British colony (part of the Commonwealth group of Nations) and we went to English-medium schools and wore uniforms (a pinafore and a tie) to school.

foreigner / stranger when I have to apply for a Visitor's Visa in order to travel to India – my



ho[me]-country. It does not help when my friends and cousins think I look *different* now, or that I talk with a 'foreign' accent. Thus I feel that no matter where I go, I seem to walk, and exist amongst strangers, "crisscrossing the borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1987), and negotiating "between a here, a there, and an elsewhere" (Trinh, 2011). After 25 years in Canada, I have begun to

wonder if it is possible for some-one like me, a hyphe-nated, culturally dis-located woman to be completely at ho[me] anywhere in the world today. This identity crisis has also aroused my post-colonial and feminist subjectivities to quest/ion how other I-M-migrant women, especially the Indo-Canadian women in Ottawa, navigate their hyphe-nated *currere* with/in these hybrid liminal spaces. I use the word "currere" as defined by Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo (2009) where "curriculum understood as *currere* (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), as autobiographical text (Pinar, 1994) and a complicated conversation with self and others (Pinar, 2000), is always a process of questing, questioning, and sojourning in words and worlds" (p. 2). I feel that '*currere*' is the right word to use in my *existential* inquiry on be/long/ing and be/com/ing because as Sumara & Davis (1998) explain in their article *Unskinning Curriculum*:

In reminding us of the Latin root of "curriculum" –that is, of *currere*, to run—Pinar (Pinar & Grumet, 1976) has helped us unsettle the once-pervasive (and, unfortunately, among school officials, still predominant) emphasis on the components of curriculum (e.g. texts, learning objectives, methods, teachers, students). With *currere*, Pinar has prompted us to be attentive to the complex, ever-evolving relations between individual and world, and, as well, to the importance of autobiography, phenomenology, and hermeneutics for informing our thinking about

curriculum. With the explicit acknowledgement that there can be no fixed or definable boundary between schooling and other lived experiences...the “path” of curriculum has been recast as a path laid while walking [sojourning], rather than a prespecified route to be followed...[thus] *currere* brings with it a sensitivity to the contingencies of existence.

p. 83-84

Diasporic Be/ginn/ings

Autobiographical writing, as currere, supports a curriculum-lived-as-migrancy, one in continual transit, of departing, returning, thinking back and writing forward

Ng-A-Fook, 2012, p.15

The global and digital age that we live in has made it possible for people to transcend geographic borders, and to sojourn in-between wor(l)ds increasing the intensity of our encounters with different “others” (Asher, 2002), and given rise to a new phenomenon of “diasporic communities” (Parameswaran, 2003). People who choose to leave, or are forced to leave their countries of birth may also be haunted by a sense of loss, exile, displacement, diaspora, isolation, and nomadism (Asher, 2002; Bhabha, 1999; Hall, 1990, Peters, 1999; Rushdie, 1991). According to Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier and Sheller (2003), “migration is experienced in relation to home and belonging, and [these] are formed in relationship to individual and collective migration” (p.1). Yet, what is required to (re)produce or (re)ground communities and make homes in the contexts of war, violence and displacement, says Gedalof (2003), is “the never-ending work done (mainly) by women, like the daily rituals of caring, cleaning, and feeding” (p.101). Diane Tye (2010) also talks about the gendered power relations

that surround food and how feeding the family is assumed to be “a part of women’s work of care” (p. 25). How do Indo-Canadian women experience the phenomena of building and (re)producing their ho[me]s, their lives, and families in Canada?

The Marathi philosopher-poet Bahina Bai Chaudhari (1900) writes²:

अरे संसार संसार, जसा तवा चुल्यावर

आधी हाताला चटके, तेव्हां मिळते भाकर!

Arrey sansara³ sansara | jasaa tawa chulyavara
adhi hathala chatakey | tevha milate bhaakara!

[Life is like a frying pan / griddle on a flame |
it stings your fingers first before you can get (eat) the bread [*naan*]!]

The other day I chanced upon the CBC Massey Lectures Series book called *Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship* by Adrienne Clarkson (2014), in which she talks about making “belonging” the interest of her life. Canada being a land of immigrants, I would imagine many people, including the former Governor-General, are interested in the notion of be/longing. Like Clarkson, I am also a *child of diaspora*, not only as an immigrant in Canada, but also as a grand-child of (im)migrants in Mumbai, and I think, many Indo-Canadians will identify with my story. My *English-educated* grandparents had migrated to Bombay / Mumbai⁴, also referred to as *Maya Nagari* –the City of Dreams and / or Illusions in *Bollywood* (the Bombay Film Industry), in the



² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxvpmBi4zrQ>

³ Sansara can mean world / life in general, or a married life / a household

⁴ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/mumbai-bombay>

1920s, from Udupi⁵ and Mangalore (South Kanara) in Karnataka which is in the South-Western part of India.

We used to hear about their experiences as *newcomers* to Bombay, of how they learned to survive in a new city and to speak in Marathi⁶ and Hindi⁷ because most people in Bombay did not speak our mother-tongue Konkani⁸, or Kannada⁹ (the second language my grandparents were familiar with). We also heard stories of how Mumbai used to be in the olden days and how Suburban Co-operative Societies or '*Colonies*' came into being so that people from the same rural villages, who belonged to the same caste and shared similar customs, could find homes and be there for each other. The men would go to work early in the morning leaving the women to take care of their homes and families.



⁵ Mangalore or Mangaluru is also known as Kodial in the Konkani language
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/karnataka/mangalore/introduction>

⁶ Bombay (Mumbai) is in the province of Maharashtra and Marathi is its official language.

⁷ Hindi is one of the official languages in India, and most merchants in Bombay speak Hindi, Marathi or Gujarati

⁸ Even though the Indian Constitution now recognizes Konkani as one of its official languages, it is still considered to be a minority language, and it does not have a script.

⁹ Kannada is one of the main languages spoken in Udupi and Mangalore

Bombay or Mumbai [मुंबई] is a city in the province of Maharashtra, in India¹⁰. The name



Mumbai comes from **Mumba Devi**, who is the principal deity / Mother

Goddess (*kula-devi*) of the fishermen or *Kolis* [कोळी], who are the

indigenous peoples or the natives of Mumbai. The fishermen seek *Mumba-*

Devi's blessings to fill their fishing nets with the bounties from the sea, and

their families invoke the Goddess to protect their men from the wrath of the ocean. The other

inhabitants of Mumbai pray to Her because she is *Notre Dame* / Our Mother [*Amchi Aai* – आमची

आई], and a visit to her temple is obligatory during a trip back *home*. The word for 'Mother' in

Marathi, the native language of Mumbai, is *aai* or *aayee* (आई), thus Mumba-aai (*Mother*

Mumba). It was anglicised to Bombay during the British era, and in 1995 it was officially

changed back to Mumbai. In the Indian vernacular / local languages and dialects it has always

been Mumbai. I mention this because I use Bombay and Mumbai interchangeably as I always

did when I was in India, but it might be confusing to the reader. For people like me, who left

Bombay before the official name change in 1995, I think it will always be Bombay (*nostalgia*).

All my official documents are from the City of Bombay, or from the University of Bombay, and

my dilemma about home /not-home seems to intensify when I have to explain this to others.

¹⁰ Map of India <http://oliviaventura.es/wp-includes/Text/Diff/india-map-with-states-name-i7.gif>

A song about Bombay – a Childhood memory

Skimming through the anthology called “*Bombay, meri jaan*”¹¹: *Writings on Mumbai*” edited by Jerry Pinto & Naresh Fernandes (2003), I came across this song which brought back memories of a childhood in Bombay where we would sing this song at picnics, parties, or get-togethers. According to the editors, this tune is still a favourite at Christian and Parsi weddings, and it truly reflects the “mongrel origins” (p. 338) of Bombay. The chorus of the song goes like this:

Come to Bombay, come to Bombay
Bombay meri hai | [Bombay is mine]
Bom bom bom bom
Bombay meri hai | *bom bom bom bom*
Bombay meri hai
Our ladies are nice, they are full of spice
Come to Bombay, come to Bombay
Bombay meri hai
 [Mumbai amchi rey | Mumbai is mine]

Naju & Mina Kava, 1969, p.338-339

From Kanara to Canada

Do we have a choice in the lives we live, or are we links in a chain that has spanned generations? Perhaps... we are mere links, with little choice in having events and traumas experienced by our ancestors revisit us in our lifetime

Esgalhado, 2003, p. 483

¹¹ “Bombay, meri jaan” literally means “Bombay, my love!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhyTSP8XnWs>

I had never dreamed that I would live anywhere else other than Bombay, and I had not really given much thought to the similarities / “links” (Esgalhado, 2003) between my grandparents’ migration to Bombay / Mumbai and my own immigration until I started on my Ph.D. journey. My paternal grandmother – *Aajji* always used to talk about her home in Udupi (Mangalore), the house she went to as a bride and she always dreamed of going back *home*. I remember, how a few weeks after coming to Canada, I had asked my mother – *Amma* to mail



me some of my childhood pictures because I was lost in a place that did not hold any memories for me. I also remember how after *Amma* passed away in 2006, I began to feel as if I really did not belong any-where. Listening to favourite Marathi and Hindi songs from my childhood would



My parents Gurudatt & Sheetala
(Sita) Balsawer (circa 1960)

bring tears to my eyes and I started to pine for home, or rather the *memory* of a home that ceased to exist for me without my parents. As Stegner (1971) states, “home is a notion that only the nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend” (p. 158-159). This longing for a home, my I-M-migrant

experiences, and my decision to stay in Canada even after my divorce has made me quest/ion how other (im)migrant women, especially the Indo-Canadian women negotiate these liminal

spaces which are both home and not-home, and this has spurred me on towards my

Auto/ethnographical Ph.D. journey / *yatra* (यात्रा).

*In my quest for a ho[Me]
I read and I questioned
I challenged and I prayed.
When prayers failed me
I walked the labyrinth.
As I walked and I reflected
It occurred to me to re/search this
Exist/ential dilemma
that would not let me Be.*

Helen Ralston (1996), one of the foremost researchers to interview Indo-Canadian women, had claimed that “from the standpoint of any immigrant woman, departure from the homeland and migration to a strange country in order to settle and start a new way of life in a different climate and unfamiliar surroundings is a dramatic step to take” (p. v). Yet, people leave their homes and settle down in *strange* countries all the time even though, one of the effects of immigration, according to Kelly (2013) is that “feeling like a ‘foreigner’ does not end” (p.2), instead, as years go by it lingers, creating mixed emotions about belonging, home, and identity. Fludernik (2003) argues that “people who identify themselves as part of a diaspora are creating an ‘imaginary’ or an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) – a landscape of dream and fantasy that answers to their desires” (p. xi). Hall (1990) calls this a “displaced ‘homeward’ journey” (p. 232) re-created through politics, memory, and desire, because “we can’t literally go home again” (p. 232). For Noddings (2003), *home* “is an extension of the self and a place that supplies us with an address and thus an identity” (p. 99). As both insider and outsider, and as

someone who has “deviated from the traditionally prescribed role” (hooks, 1990; Trinh, 1989) of a *good* Indian (*Hindu*) woman, I am interested in the live(d) experiences of other Indo-Canadian women as they/we (re)create or per/form this notion of ho[me] and community in Canada, through the constant process of “adjustment, transformation, negotiation and redefinition” (Ahmed, 2000). I engaged in complicated conversation(s) with Indo-Canadian women to understand how they/ we create and define our homes and our identities, our *imaginary(ies)* with/in the hyphe-nated spaces that we now in/habit. I wanted to highlight their/our live(d) experiences and to catch/capture the often unheard stories of our *hidden* hybrid currere in their /our own “marginalized [*ordinary*] voices” (Munro, 1998, p. 6).

My quest for a re/search methodology to (re)present Indo-Canadian women’s live(d) or “lived-through” (Rosenblatt, 1982) experiences / stories by “employ[ing] a hierarchy of voices to identify the indigenous voices” (Denzin, 1989, p.246), has drawn me to Autoethnography – “journeys of the Self[ves]” (Russell, 1999). My auto/ethnographical journey spans different cities, countries, and continents, it is a story of a here, a there, and an every-where, of hopes, dreams, losses and memories, of (sub)liminal spaces and suspended conversations and silences between utterances, of (im)possibilities and imag(e)/inations. It is a “complicated conversation with self and others” (Pinar, 2000), part memoir – “a looking back, a reminiscence” (Goldberg, 2008), part “biotext...an innately cumulative performance” (Wah, 2006), part auto-bio-graphy and life writing where I write “about the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p.37), and where I address questions about ho[me] and identity, cultural dis/placement and “hyph-e-nations” (Ng-a-Fook, 2009, p.52). It is also a “bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2005), a quilt (tissage / weaving) / collage / “montage” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.7) where I “borrow from other disciplines / methods” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4) namely, “Narrative Inquiry” (Chase,

2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), “Poetic Inquiry” (Butler-Kisber, 2010), “Performance [auto]ethnography” (Alexander, 2000), and literary (narrative) “transactions” (Rosenblatt, 1982). By interrogating the various inter/secting forces that define us and create us, I wanted to understand the process of my/our be/com/ing and be/long/ing in these (sub)liminal spaces which are both home and not-home. I will intersperse our complicated conversations with literary pieces, and artifacts like memoirs, photographs, recipes, souvenirs and other bits and b(i)ytes that showcase our hyphe-nated experiences. In their book *Treasures*, Cairns and Silverman (2004) tell us that in talking to women about the things or objects / artefacts that they keep, we understand that:

By acting as the archivists of their own lives and the lives of others who are central to their self-definition – principally their children, sisters, aunts, mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers – they build a record of personal development, a history that places them in time and place, and confirms their most deeply held values and sources of meaning.

p. vii

This process / performance of weaving / braiding the “bricoles – the odds and ends, the conversation bits” (Harper, 1987, p. 74) of my participants’ live(d)-through experiences / stories and the artefacts will be my story-quilt or a “literary métissage” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009):

Literary métissage...is a way to generate, represent and critique knowledge through writing and braiding autobiographical texts. As research, literary métissage not only describes experience; it is a strategy for interpreting those experiences as documented... Through the creative interplay of life writing texts, métissage becomes a contact zone where dialogue among multiple and mixed socio-cultural,

racial, (trans)national, and gendered groups can occur. This exchange of ideas and insights—arising from lived [or lived-through] experience—constitutes a new space and practice for curriculum inquiry.

p. 34-35

Through this curriculum inquiry, and as an insider / outsider, I hope to showcase the hidden, unplanned, unpredictable, “*currere*” (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), or “curriculum-as-live(d)” (Aoki, 2000/2005) experiences representing “both the past experiences as well as the *live* or ongoing experiences” (Aoki, 2005, p. 414) of the Indo-Canadian women in Ottawa, who, in my opinion, are often silent or in/visible on the Canadian landscape. In the article *Language, Culture, and Curriculum...*, Ted Aoki (2000/2005) explains that:

if we graphically mark the word “curriculum” as Curric/ulum, we note that the ‘crack’ offers us two understandings of curriculum: curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-live(d)...Curriculum-as-plan is the conventionalized notion of mandated school subjects...Curriculum-as-live(d) is the curriculum experienced by students and teachers as they live through school life. Much of this curriculum is unplanned and unplannable... pedagogy is located in the vibrant space in the fold between curriculum-as-plan and live(d) curricula, at times a site of difficulty and ambiguity and also a site of generative possibilities and hope.

p. 322

In my research, I extend the definition of curriculum-as-live(d) to include the live(d) and living-through experiences of Indo-Canadian women - wives, m/others, grand/m/others - as they create this notion called ho[me] and per/form their hyphenated *currere* —“the path of curriculum laid while walking” (Sumara & Denis, 1998, p.84) amidst these hyphe-nated, diasporic spaces.

From an educational perspective, I hope this literary métissage / life writing / “curriculum of life” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 146) becomes a “living pedagogy” and has the “potential to become transformative curriculum inquiry” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 205) which will help de/construct the image of the *exotic* and/or *universal* Indian woman, or in other words, deconstruct the (mis)representations related to *ordinary* Indo-Canadian girls and women.

Hyphe-nated (un)Complicated Conversations

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie (1991) muses on the “problems of definition” he faces as a British Indian writer:

What does it mean to be ‘Indian’ outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to Western [as opposed to Eastern /Indian] ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? These questions are all a single, existential question: How are we to live in the world?

p. 17-18

Rushdie’s sentiments were the *leitmotif* or underlying theme for my quest/ions and conversations with my participants. I started each question with a quotation hoping that this would help move the conversations forward:

1. “Departure from the homeland and migration to a strange country in order to settle and start a new way of life in a different climate and unfamiliar surroundings is a dramatic step to take” says Helen Ralston (1996). When did you move to Canada? What was the reason for this move to Canada?

2. Kelley (2013) states, that “feeling like a ‘foreigner’ does not end, instead, as years go by it lingers, creating mixed emotions about belonging, home, and identity.” What do you think about this statement? What are your experiences of immigrating to Canada?
3. Sometimes I feel like I live in-between or that my life is like “Trishanku”. What does it mean for you to be an Indo-Canadian?
4. According to Ahmed, Castenada, Fortier & Shellar (2003), “Migration is experienced in relation to home and belonging.” How do you define *home*? What are some of your experiences of making a home in Canada?
5. Women are known to preserve things and objects throughout their lives. Are there any memorable objects or things that you treasure and/or cherish? Would you like to tell me about these treasures of yours?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences?

Research Framework – Journey / Yatra

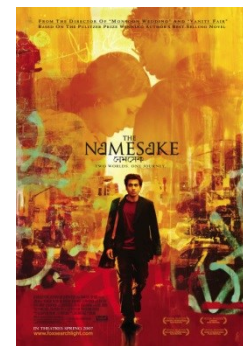
This kind of opportunity for probing does not come easily to a person flowing within the mainstream. It comes more readily to one who lives at the margin—to one who lives in a tension situation.

Aoki, 1979, p. 336

I was raised in a post-colonial, post-independent India by *English*-educated, liberal, yet *traditional* parents and grand-parents, and I bring my vulnerabilities and subjectivities / ambivalences into my writing. Being introduced to post-colonial writers like Aoki, Asher, Anzaldúa, Bhabha, Narayan, Parameswaran, Rushdie, Said, Trinh, Visweswaran and others during my graduate studies, has helped me make sense of my hyphe-nated, diasporic (in)experiences and has made me (de)/(re)/construct and (re)invent my post-colonial subjectivities. I agree with Tyagi (1996) when she says that these writings have “put human faces to Third World, post-colonial theory” (p. x). It has also made me aware of what it means to live as an Indo-Canadian woman in a so-called multi/cultural society like Ottawa. In the beginning, I felt lost and dis/located, as if I was constantly (re)searching (my)self, and engaging in a dialogue between an “I” (self) and “thou” (other / self-other), which seemed caught in “a series of epistemological ruptures and alterity” (Johnson, Chamber, Raghuram & Ticknell, 2004, p.46). I have also realized that my struggles to negotiate my different identities and voices are not just with/out but also with/in me. Thus my experiences have made me quest/ion how other immigrant women, especially the Indo-Canadian women, negotiate their hyphe-nated I-entities and find their way with/in Canada.

I ventured out on this re/search *yatra* (journey) with a topic that is close to my heart, but one that seems to have received scant attention from researchers in terms of understanding the live(d) experiences of Indo-Canadian women particularly in Ottawa, emphasizing the fact that

women have been “understudied in much immigration research” (Kelley, 2013, p.5). The media is not interested in *accidental* immigrants says Kelley (2013) perhaps because “their stories are less dramatic” (p.3). Ralston (1996), had also argued, that in the studies that were conducted, the migration of South Asians had not received enough attention from researchers, and she had bemoaned the fact that “the migration of South Asian women had virtually been ignored” (p.2). In the last decade or so, however, due to rapid globalization and trans/migration, researchers have studied immigration issues and conflicts amongst South Asians in general and women in particular. These studies deal with the imagined social and cultural Diasporas in the written (literary) texts to the cultural and religious conflicts and coping styles of Asian Indian women, to the politics of identity and (mis)representation amongst second generation South Asians. (Banerjee-Stevens, 2009; Gilmore 1994; Handa, 2003; Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman 2012; Kuortti, 2007; Lahiri, 2003; Srinivasan, 1994). Fictional books and children’s picture books have been written and published by Indo-Canadians and Indo-Americans about their experiences in North America with a view to educate and enlighten others, and almost all films which have a *Bollywood* or Indian theme, deal with issues of identity, (im)migration, dis/placement, loss and its subsequent hope in a new country. *Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, the short story which was made into a movie, is a good example of a story / movie that portrays the dilemmas and conflicts of *I-m-migrants* from India. Most of the research on Indo-Canadians or South-Asians in Canada has been conducted in places with a higher Indo-Canadian population ratio like Atlantic Canada, Calgary, Vancouver, and Toronto. In the last 25 years I have been in Canada, I have not seen, heard, or participated in any research that involved the live(d) experiences of Indo-Canadian women in Ottawa. I have only come across Vasanthi



Srinivasan's (1994) study on religion, which dealt with the religious and social life amongst Hindu women in Canada, which included women from Ottawa, Thus, I felt that the experiences or stories of the women in the National Capital Region have been ignored / overlooked, and their "ways of knowing [and understanding their wor(l)ds] have been neglected by the dominant ideologies of our times" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Then last year (2016), as I was writing my thesis, I received an email from a local bookstore about a book launch of the book *Resilience and Triumph: Immigrant women tell their stories* – "a collection of personal stories of more than 50 racialized immigrant women who have made Canada their home over the last five decades" (from the back cover of the book) – edited and compiled by the Book Project Collective.¹² I was surprised to see that a few of their contributors were Indo-Canadian women from Ottawa; and the stories in the collection resonate with the narratives of my participants because "[the stories] offer an enormous insight into the range of ways in which immigrant, racialized women have survived and thrived" (Jiwani, 2016, p. 2).

I limited my study to women in Ottawa because, apart from the fact that it was convenient to have face-to-face interviews with the women, I felt that there was also a strong representation of people from the different regions of India. Unlike in BC where there might be a concentration of Punjabis or Sikhs from the Punjab region, or in Toronto, where one might come across people who belong to the Gujarati community, Indo-Canadians in Ottawa seem to represent the diverse cultures and social classes of India. As an auto/ethnographer and

¹² <https://secondstorypress.ca/book-project-collective/> "The Book Project Collective encompasses women from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious backgrounds and national origins who share a passionate commitment to the community of immigrant and racialized women in Canada. It formed around a shared purpose – to help those whose voices are muted, those who are differentiated as racialized others and labeled "visible minority," "newcomer," and "woman of colour" articulate their life stories."

Storycatcher¹³ (Baldwin, 2005), I wanted to collect narratives from other Indo-Canadian women from varied cultural backgrounds, in order to understand and to demonstrate the many ways we women define, experience, per/form and negotiate / navigate our hyphe-nated currere.

From an Indo-Canadian perspective, in the last 20-30 years, Ottawa has grown, (and is rapidly growing), and more immigrants from India now choose to settle down here instead of going to the other metropolitan cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. When I first arrived here in the early 1990's, there were fewer Indo-Canadian families in Ottawa and it seemed like they all knew each other. There were only two grocery stores that sold items from India and people would have to go to Toronto or to Montreal if they craved 'authentic' Indian goods or fresh vegetables and groceries. Now, even stores like Loblaws stock items, including regional specialities from India, in their International aisles and Ottawa has some of the best Indian restaurants in North America. Musicians from India, who would refuse to perform to a small Ottawa audience in the 1990's, now stop in Ottawa to entertain their ever-increasing fans. Attending the annual *Festival of India* and the *South Asian Fest* in Ottawa is like a sojourn to India. *Bollywood* movies are screened as a regular feature in movie theatres and on TV channels in Ottawa, and are also available in DVD formats at the Ottawa Public Library. There are weekly Indian radio programmes that play old favourite songs as well as new and emerging genres of music, and broadcast the latest Indian news and Bollywood gossip (*gupshup* | गपशप). Even yoga seems to be in high demand here than back home in Bombay, which makes me think that ironically, (or maybe *tragically*), even though I live here, I have easy access to things from India and perhaps I am more "*Indian*" in Canada, than I would have been in Bombay!

¹³ For my MA thesis I exp-lore how young children interpret the stories they hear within a story-world. I called myself a Storycatcher because I was Storycatching their stories / narratives and their transactions in response to the stories they heard during scheduled story times at the library.

Setting the stage for a Ph.D. journey / yatra performance

In my family, before we embark on a journey, or a new (ad)venture, or when we purchase a new home / car, we invoke the blessings of Lord Ganesh¹⁴ or Ganapati¹⁵ (the elephant-headed God, the God of Learning and New Beginnings) by lighting an oil lamp, by burning incense or camphor to purify the air, and stringing garlands with beautiful flowers. As I venture out on this Ph.D. journey, I recite this Ganesh *shloka* (prayer) to seek *Ganapati-bappa's*¹⁶ blessings.

	वक्रतुण्ड महाकाय सूर्यकोटि समप्रभ निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा Vakra-Tunda Maha-Kaaya Surya-Koti Sama-prabha Nir-vighnam Kuru Me Deva Sarva-Kaar-yeshu Sar-vadaa <i>O Lord Ganesha, of the Curved Trunk and massive body, the one whose splendour is equal to a million Suns Please bless me so that I may not face any obstacles in my endeavours.¹⁷</i> [Ganesh clipart designed by my cousin Vasudha Kailaje]
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¹⁴ Paul Courtright (1985) in his book, “*Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*” writes “For Hindus, this particular deity is the most popular and universally adored of the reputed 330 million deities that make up the Hindu pantheon...He is praised at the beginning of ceremonies of worship and at marriages and other important rites of passage” (p.4)

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganesha#cite_note-Vignesh-11

¹⁶ In Bombay, Lord Ganesh is addressed as **bappa** / बाप्पा /Uncle and so for all His devotees, he is Ganapati-bappa.

¹⁷ <http://www.drikpanchang.com/vedic-mantra/gods/lord-ganesha/vakratunda-mahakaya-mantra.html>

Call of the Labyrinth



Photo of the labyrinth from a postcard by
pathadventures.com

In Canada, my life challenges and my quest/ions have led me to the labyrinth. When Amma died in 2006, I had this insane urge to run until I could run no more. I felt home-less and orphaned, and with no children of my own, and no nieces or nephews either (at that time), it felt as if there was no past and no future to my existence – only this silent void. Going to the temple, which had always been a contentious issue, seemed even more senseless. Then 2 years later, in 2008, just by chance, trying to escape the sudden downpour during the *West Fest* summer fair, I happened to join the Baobab tree drummers playing drums on the labyrinth inside the All Saint's Anglican Church¹⁸ in Ottawa. A few days later, when the Church had a Summer Solstice celebration on their outdoor labyrinth, I decided to go and join them because it happened to be the day my niece was being christened in *Mayotte*, and I wanted to do something special to celebrate her birth. As I started to walk, a young girl who was just passing by with her father insisted that they walk the labyrinth as well, so the surprised father along with his daughter joined me, and in a strange way I felt as if my brother and my niece were right there beside me.

¹⁸ <http://www.allsaintswestboro.com/index.php/join-us/labyrinth-walk>

This walk brought some peace and hope back into my life, and I decided to try and walk the different labyrinths in and around Ottawa like a sort of pilgrimage. Walking / *Sojourning* the 7-circuit¹⁹ or the 11-circuit labyrinth has given me the strength and resilience to wade through the messiness / contingencies of my life. It is said that the labyrinth is a metaphor for *coming home (to oneself)*, or, it could be a journey (*yatra*) into the center of our own being / self(ves). These walks (*sojourns*) also remind me of the many *pradakshinas* (circumambulations)²⁰ I made around the temples in India with my family and my friends.



The labyrinth is an ancient form of prayer that transcends the limits of still meditation: It is a metaphor for our spiritual journey and a powerful tool for transformation

*Bells Corners United Church website*²¹



Unlike a maze, the labyrinth has a single path leading to the center with no loops, cul-de-sacs or forks. The labyrinth is a universal symbol for the world, with its complications and difficulties, which we experience on our journey through life. The entry to the labyrinth is birth; the center is death and eternal life. Like any pilgrimage, the labyrinth represents the inner pilgrimage we are called to make to take us to the center of our being

*Anglican Diocese of Ottawa website*²²

¹⁹ The 7 circuits are supposed to correspond to the 7 chakras / energy centres of the body

²⁰ As youngsters, much to our elders' chagrin, we used to run around the temple at breakneck speed competing with each other to do the most number of circumambulations until the priest or another adult would come out and stop us.

²¹ <http://www.bcuc.org/labyrinth.htm>

²² <http://www.ottawa.anglican.ca/Prayer.html>

The labyrinth walk facilitators²³ at St. Luke's Church in Ottawa, where they have a monthly candle-lit labyrinth walk, explain that:

There are three stages to the walk: *releasing* (surrendering) on the way in; *receiving* (listening) in the center; and *returning* when you follow the return path back out of the labyrinth. Symbolically, and sometimes actually, you are taking back out into the world that which you have received.²⁴

The three stages of walking / so-journing the labyrinth will be the stepping stones of my research journey: Inviting / gathering / recruiting my participants to walk this journey with me and to share their ho[me] story(ies); releasing my fears and insecurities in order to receive (listen to) their live(d) stories; and finally returning with *gifts* / story-threads to perform / braid my literary métissage.

Accidental I-m-migrants

*I am left with no choice but to straddle two disparate cultures and languages...
the melancholic immigrant is sometimes haunted by a double vision*

Kim, 2005, p. 380

Globalization, colonization and multi/culturalism have led to dis/locations, dis/placements and trans/migratory practices amongst people who seem to exist in hybrid spaces, suspended between wor(l)ds, cultures, and languages, in a state of “exilic migrancy” (Bhabha, 1999). “Perhaps a person of the twentieth century can exist honestly only as a foreigner” notes Kristeva (1986, p. 286). When people / *foreigners* belonging to different ethnic groups form a community outside their traditional homeland, they become part of a diaspora. Cohen (1997) distinguishes between two types of diaspora: “victim [*imposed*] diaspora” (p. 26) – dispersal

²³ <http://www.pathadventures.com/>

²⁴ <http://www.veriditas.org/guidelines>

from an original homeland, often traumatically, and “non-victim [*elective*] diaspora” (p. 26) – expansion from a homeland in search of work, or in pursuit of trade. According to Mishra (1996), free labour movements across the globe have led to a new version of the elective diaspora, where there is “a tendency to see one’s exile as negotiable, semi-permanent or even merely temporary” (p. 421-422). Most Indo-Canadians are part of this new version of diaspora since they come to Canada “not as refugees fleeing from an oppressive regime; nor with the widely shared cultural memory of slavery and enforced exile from their original mother tongue” (Parameswaran, 2003, p. xlv), but they come to seek better job opportunities, or to pursue their educational dreams, or like in my case, they get married and move here. Besides, in multi/cultural Canada, these “accidental immigrants” –[who] make intentional life decisions that involve marriage, education, or career advancement – that lead to the secondary and sometimes unanticipated outcome of long-term immigration” (Kelley, 2013, p. 3), are also able to preserve and protect their cultural traditions despite being so far away from their homeland.

In Canada, the Indian diaspora is comprised of people who identify themselves as Indo-Canadian, East Indian or South Asian. With the influx of immigrants from India to Canada, apart from the Indo-Canada Association (ICA), there are other Spiritual / Religious centres/societies, temples, and gurdwaras [Sikh temples] that have been established to fulfil the needs of the different regional and religious groups within the diaspora. I agree with Fludernik (2003) that “the supposed ‘identity’ of South Asians is merely mythic” because in India, the Indian caste system separates people “but they are happy to join together as a group in the USA [and in Canada/North America] because they see themselves as different from East Asians and Chicanos” (p. xx). She goes on to elaborate that the problem with diasporic consciousness and so-called multi/culturalism is to some extent both paradoxical and regressive because:

People who have been motivated by the [North] American success-story to leave their frequently-repressive home countries in order to test their individual talents and chances abroad are forced back into the fold of their native communities. If women emigrated in order to be rid of the constraints of paternalistic culture, they now not only encounter discrimination as representatives of the home culture but find themselves additionally caught in the net of identity politics that frustrates their chances of American assimilation / [Canadian integration]. Diaspora is not only a consequence of globalization; it is itself determined by the effects of globalization. Emigrating to another country no longer allows one to make a clean break with the past; on the contrary one's ethnic affiliation with all its attendant responsibility re-emerges – a ghost that has followed the emigrant and catches up with [them] after arrival. The contemporary scenario of diasporic communities privilege communal collective rights over individual rights and collective identity over private self.

p. xxii

Trinh (2011) adds that for many members of the diaspora, “their sense of group solidarity, of ethnic and national identity has been nourished in the milieu of the immigrant, the refugee, and the exiled” (p. 31). Immigrants are attracted to join their ethnic social networks or “enclaves of people from their first culture” confirms Kelley (2013, p. 82), because these networks provide information about jobs and residences and help immigrants adjust to their new country. Parameswaran (2003), says that the tendency of members to bond exclusively with their diasporic family can be dangerous and unhealthy because “a diaspora could end up ghettoizing itself, as is happening in larger centres of North America where one can have all the social and emotional networking one needs without going outside of one's own ethnocentric community”

(p. xlviii). This trend towards self-ghettoization and insularization becomes more evident when the numbers within any particular group increase, leading Parameswaran (2003), to state that “both exile and home are here, within the new homeland” (p. xlix). I have noticed this trend amongst the Indo-Canadians in Ottawa in the last 25 years I have been here. Also in Bombay, as a child of diaspora, I have experienced this insularization and ghettoization because majority of the residents in our co-operative society or ‘Colony’ were members of my *community*, and it was believed that some people could trace your ancestry and narrate the (mis)deeds of your ancestors just by knowing your last-name!

I am also aware that women in diasporic communities face a “triple-bind” (Trinh, 1989, p. 6) because if they choose to speak up or assert their differences, they face the threat of being alienated or distanced from their communities and their cultures, because they no longer fit in with the traditionally prescribed roles. “I also call this kind of alienation from my own community as ‘*reverse discrimination*’” (Balsawer & Feng, 2010, p.155-156). I am curious to see how Indo-Canadian women experience these ‘communal’ privileges/constraints, ghettoization and insularization, and define or find ho[me] with/in or with/out these hybrid collective boundaries and discrepancies. To some extent, I agree with Mukherjee (1990) when she says that there is no point in “clinging to a culture that is thousands of miles away. Why not adjust and accommodate to the world around you?” (p. 8). Yet, it is only by knowing our past, can we move forward and face the future because as Hall (1990) tells us “cultural identity belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (p. 225). Fludernik (2003) also points out that “Identity operates through narrative which needs to start in the past [memory] and pace its way to a(n) [imaginary] future that embraces and resolves the discrepancies between past and

present” (p. xxix). For those who have left their homes, “a nostalgic relation to both the past and home might become part of the lived reality in the present” state Ahmed et al (2003, p. 9), since the act of “crossing a geopolitical border does not mean that emotional ties to the immigrant’s former home will automatically be cut” (Kelley, 2013, p. 43). Sometimes it might appear as if the emotional ties grow stronger as we move farther away from this place called *home*.

Playing house – a memoir

Thinking of home reminds me of my childhood when my girl-friends and I used to play



house, or, as we called it “ghar-ghar”²⁵ (house-house | घर-घर) with miniature cooking pots made out of brass, steel, or wood. In this make-believe *home game*, we would pretend to be grown-ups, and perform / enact life-events or scenarios

we had witnessed, even repeating the (adult) conversations we had over-heard; perhaps un/knowingly even revealing family secrets to each other. At times, we dressed up in our mothers’ saris and we pretended to cook in these pots by using dry ingredients like puffed rice [*poha*], coconut and sugar. We would *travel* to imaginary places to eat these *exotic* meals, and I remember how we would be engrossed in this game for hours. My younger brother would occasionally join us, even though, interestingly enough, boys were normally excluded, or did not seem to show any interest in playing this game. Now I wonder if this was because the traditional Indian kitchen was most often a woman’s domain – even though chefs always seemed to be (and still are) men – and only girls and women were taught, and expected to know how to cook and be

²⁵ In my dialect of Konkani, which is my mother-tongue, we tend to repeat words in sentences for e.g. ‘ghar-ghar’ (house-house). We even have a term for it “dub-double words”.

home-makers, whereas men were supposed to go out and work. Suma Chitnis (2000) in the book “Faces of the feminine in ancient, medieval, and modern India” writes that:

The games children play often function as a mechanism for their socialization, particularly games that simulate adult roles—for instance, when little girls play at homemaking or teaching school or, little boys play cops and robbers. As children try to play an allocated role to perfection, they understand what is expected of them. It is easy to see how traditional norms and values pertaining to the roles of women are communicated and reinforced through these generations [through the games, the rituals, and the narratives from mythology] ...As they play at homemaking...little girls are put through their paces for their adult roles as [*well-behaved / good*] mothers, wives, and homemakers.

p. 253-254

While we *played house* on our balconies, our mothers, grand/mothers, or other aunties²⁶ would be at home performing their house-hold chores, and if they heard us gossiping about family secrets, or if we got into fights with each other, they would admonish us and tell us to behave like *good* girls. They would also caution / threaten us that if we were too argumentative, then our *future* mothers-in-law / husbands might not tolerate such behaviours! This would make us all giggle, and we would start imitating the



I am on the far left with my childhood friends and my brother

²⁶ As children, we were expected to address our elders –parents’ friends and any of our own friends’ parents as Aunties and/or Uncles as a sign of respect.

ways our mothers, or aunts would defer to their mothers-in-law – our grandmothers. Diane Tye (2010) who talks about the dominance of food in women’s lives and the ensuing gendered power relations in her book *Baking as Biography: A life in recipes*, says “Food bridges generations of women...this seems natural, for as I remember these women I think of them most often in their kitchens, preparing food, serving food, cleaning up food” (p.27). As we got older, we stopped *playing house* but we would still get together to experiment with new and / or favourite dishes in our (grand) m/others’ kitchens. I was still experimenting with my cooking when I immigrated to



All dressed-up in sarees for Diwali. I am seated right in the middle (circa, 1980-81)

Canada in 1991 as a *new* bride. In the beginning it was as if I was *playing house* in an imaginary place with strangers (my husband and my in-laws at the time), and it did not feel like *home* at all. Some of the ingredients we used were called by different names in Canada, and some were not even available in the grocery stores in

Ottawa. Even my husband and my in-laws

seemed to behave very differently in Canada than they did whilst they were visiting India, and I was surprised that in spite of having lived overseas (USA, Canada, and the Middle-East) for over 30 years, they held very traditional *Indian (Hindu)* views regarding women; especially the roles of a wife and a daughter-in-law. As someone who had been raised in a more *modern* India (the 1990s of Bombay), I found it hard to adjust to their ways of thinking and I started to question and confront them openly about their attitudes and beliefs.

On being a “good” / ideal (Indian / Hindu) girl /woman

*Her hope was to be good, and do good,
and not necessarily in the orderly, customary, wifely way.*

Munro, 2007, p.35

*Too many women in too many countries
speak the same language of silence.*

Sengupta, 1995

As Chitnis (2000) mentions, playing house was a mechanism for our socialization and it was also a way to teach young girls to be ‘*good or ideal*’ wives, mothers and homemakers. Most Hindu girls are expected to live up to the ideal of the mythological *Sita* (Daughter of the Earth-Goddess *Bhumi*, consort of Sri Rama (one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu), the heroine of the epic *Ramayana*), who is regarded as the epitome of wifely duties, sacrifice and penance. Yet, over the years, Amma – (whose name incidentally happened to be *Sita*) –and I started to dis/agree as to what constitutes a “good” middle-class, *Brahmin Hindu / Indian* woman. Amma (my *good* mother) who encouraged me to study, and taught me to be brave, independent, and self-reliant, also took full responsibility for raising me to be a ‘*good*’ (read *obedient/ submissive*), *middle-class Indian (Religion: Hindu, Caste: Brahmin)* daughter and *wife* (because as the only daughter, not wanting to get married was not really as an option) who would conform to the traditional (*conservative*) Hindu values. It was ok for me to argue with my parents and my brothers, but when my grandparents, or other people came to visit, I was supposed to be quiet (read *silent*) and submissive and keep my opinions to myself. Chitnis (2000) also writes about the “*silence of the well-behaved woman*”²⁷ (p. 266) –the expectation that the well-behaved /

²⁷ Unfortunately this ‘*epidemic*’ or ‘*conspiracy*’ of silence is also the main reason wo/men (and children) not only in India, but also around the world have been (and are still being) abused and controlled /terrorized, because if they dare to speak up they are accused of bringing shame / dis-honour to their families and to their community. It is only in the last few years that the violence and suffering of women is being portrayed openly in Indian dramas, movies and books like “*Water*” and “*Heaven on Earth*” (both directed by Deepa Mehta, and both incidentally banned in

good-mannered woman will not speak in the presence of elders and others she respects (*husband included*), and yet:

For those who have learned to decipher it, however, this culturally conditioned silence can be extremely articulate. In fact it speaks in many voices [*volumes*], each distinctly different. For instance, what the coy silence of the bashful bride says is very different from what is communicated by the nervous silence of the timid new daughter-in-law or by the frightened silence of the ill-treated wife. The defiant silence of an angry woman conveys messages that are altogether different from those conveyed by the resilient silence of the woman who had learned to endure...[Those] who have to live with the silence of women in the family have always interpreted these many silences and taken their cues from the accompanying body language.

p. 266 -267

When I got married and I came to Canada, the un-spoken rule was that I would *behave myself* (and not bring any shame / dis-honour upon my family), and be a good Indian daughter / wife / daughter-in-law, *obey* my husband and my in-laws *unconditionally* and not get into any arguments with him / them. So, after a couple of years when I could no longer tolerate his abuses and I decided to divorce my husband, Amma (who, herself, used to argue with my father), thought that I had become *too Westernized* because she maintained that *divorces only happen in America / the Western countries and never in India!*²⁸ She blamed herself for the failure of my marriage and blamed my father for raising me *like a son*. Uma Narayan (1997) talks about these

India), "Monsoon Wedding" (Directed by Mira Nair), "Secret Daughter" (written by Shilpi Somaya Gowda) and "Tell it to the Trees" (written by Anita Rau Badami).

²⁸ I had never heard, or even knew of anyone who was divorced when I was growing up. I attribute this to the conspiracy of silence because people were (and still are) "silenced by the cultural shame of articulating such 'private' matters" (Narayan, 1997, p.11).

cultural paradoxes / dynamics in her book *disLocating Cultures* which reflect my own dynamics / conflicts with my m/other - Amma:

Both our mothers and our mother-cultures give us all sorts of contradictory messages, encouraging their daughters to be confident, impudent, and self-assertive even as they attempt to instill conformity, decorum, and silence, seemingly oblivious to these contradictions...And so they tend to regard their feminist daughters as symptoms of their failure to raise us with respect for “our” traditions, as daughters who have rejected the lessons they were taught by their mothers and mother-cultures. In seeing us in this mode, they fail to see how much what we are is precisely a response to the very things they taught us, how much we have become the daughters they have shaped us into becoming.

p. 8

Some of the Indo-Canadian women I knew in Ottawa criticized me (even ostracized me,

“[Sita] will not be bound by rules of civilization. Rejected, she refuses to return to Ayodhya as queen or wife. She does not feel the need to follow her husband, this time, as wife. She does not feel obliged to represent the prosperity of the household that rejected her, or bring good luck into it. When asked to prove her chastity once more she returns to the bowels of earth, whence she came from.” Devdutt Pattanaik (2016) in *The Girl who chose...*

and excluded me from all social invitations) and gave me the example of the mythological *Sita*, reminding me of the importance to stay true to our culture in spite of living in a *Western / foreign* world. When I reminded them that *Sita*²⁹ was a feminist in her own right, who had raised her twin sons by herself and had in the end, refused to join her husband *Rama*, they accused

me of being too argumentative. Some women even claimed that they never disagreed with their

²⁹ The Girl who chose: <http://www.amazon.in/Girl-Who-Chose-Narrating-Ramayana/dp/0143334638>

husbands, and others made excuses for why they put up with the marital and emotional abuses meted out to them. Some others felt that associating with *foreigners* / Canadians (my colleagues) was the root cause of all my problems; until I reminded them that we were the *foreigners* in this country! Thus, due to differences in opinions, experiences, world-views and attitudes, I had stopped socializing with the Indo-Canadian women.

Vulnerable I

Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story.

Trinh, 1989, p.119

Everything is story—and story is rhizomatic.

Collage...decoupage...montage...bricolage...gouache.

Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p.14

I begin my auto/ethnographical journey at the interstices of defending my proposal, getting the Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, seeking and recruiting participants, and starting a complicated conversation(s) with my participants / co-researchers to understand the ways in which they / (we) negotiate and navigate their / (our) hyphe-nated *currere* / *curriculum of life* within these liminal spaces which are both home and not-home. How might our live(d) curriculum become a “living pedagogy” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009) or “stories to live by” (Clandinin & Connelly 1999) of my / our “be/com/ing” (Leggo, 1995) and /or be/long/ing?

Living in Canada, I have met women from all around the world who have shared their stories of home / not-home, be/longing / not-be/longing with me. As a member of a tight-knit Indo-Canadian diaspora, I have sometimes felt that it is the women from *my* Indo-Canadian community who have been *silent* and have been reticent to share their stories, and at times have

even “Othered” me. Perhaps, it is because I dared to question the cultural constraints / status and deviated from the traditionally *prescribed* role of a *good, dutiful* Indian (Hindu) woman / wife. Or perhaps, it is (was) my own *vulnerable* perception where I felt (and at times still feel) I was being judged, singled-out, alienated, isolated, and simultaneously praised / feared, and criticized for my courage to stand up for my rights.

Mandakranta Bose (1999) in the book *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India*, says:

The views on the women of India are beset with stereotypes...labels such as docile, gentle, or nurturing undoubtedly connote some social realities but through uncritical usage have become such universal verities that they invite little or no attention to the conditions that gave rise to them, obscure facts, and demand conformity. They also disregard women’s own initiatives, often futile but never abandoned

p. xi

As an insider, but mostly as an outsider, my quest is to un/ravel the my/st(o)eries or to crack the silence(s) because after all, as Trinh (2011) states:

[b]ut I am a stranger to myself and a stranger now in a strange land...Sometimes I see my country people as complete strangers. But their country is my country...Here too, Their country is My country. (p. 34)

In my attempt to de/construct the image of the *ideal or universal Indian woman*, I too, “struggle with and acknowledge my complicities [implicated-ness] in the discourses that constitute my identity/ies” (Sharma, 2009, p. 120). I realize that I am “part of the metaphoric parade” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42) in which people, places, and stories, past, present, and future are

“inextricably linked” (p. 41). Thus my re-search on ho[me] and home-coming is (and will be) like a “never-ending dialogue with self and others [and others in the self]” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al 2009, p. 226) because, *home*, as Trinh (2011) claims “is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine” (p. 12) which is always in transit in liminal sp(l)ace(s).

“Everyone joins a band in this life. And what you play always affects someone. Sometimes, it affects the world”
Mitch Albom (2015) in *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*, p. 489

Designing the Research yatra

*Autobiography and memoir have similar capacities as fiction
for building imagination and empathy*

Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009, p. 26

I decided to invite 8-10 Indo-Canadian women who had come to Canada as adults, and who had lived in Ottawa for approximately 20-30 years to participate in my study. My intent was that by talking to other women I would be able to comprehend how their experiences of living in Ottawa (Canada) as adult Indo-Canadian women, might have shaped their world views, and how this might have affected their / (our) sense of be/longing and be/coming. Those who stay in “an adopted country, go through a continual process of adjustment to and learning about both their new country and themselves” says Kelley (2013, p. 3). Drawing on the post-colonial feminist lens, I wanted to “self-consciously” engage with these women through “the emotional / personal / affective dimensions along with the academic and intellectual aspects [in order to understand] the struggles without as well as the conflicts within” (Asher, 2002, p. 86) of navigating a hyphenated currere.

Besides, like Sue Monk Kidd (2006) writes in “*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*”:

I also needed to hear other women's stories in order to see and embrace my own. Sometimes another woman's story becomes a mirror that shows me a self I haven't seen before. When I listen to her tell it, her experience quickens and clarifies my own. Her questions rouse mine. Her conflicts illumine my conflicts. Her resolutions call forth my hope. Her strengths summon my strengths. All of this can happen even when our stories and our lives are very different.

p. 172

The criteria to participate in my study was that these women were “accidental immigrants” as per Kelley’s (2013) definition who, as adults, “make intentional life decisions that involve marriage, education, or career advancement – that lead to the secondary and sometimes unanticipated outcome of long-term immigration” (p. 3). They would have lived in Ottawa for approximately 20-30 years, and should have adopted Ottawa as their home. They would still have to have some connection to India or to their Indian-ness, and the most important criteria was that they would share their live(d) experiences with me with the understanding that our conversation “constitutes a portal into knowing oneself and the world better through another” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 206).

I took into consideration the reality of *arranged marriages* (which are not ‘forced’ marriages)³⁰, and also the fact that the decision to live in Canada might not have been the

³⁰ People tend to have different notions as to what constitutes an arranged marriage. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “*a marriage in which the husband and wife are chosen for each other by their parents.*” In my experience, an *arranged* marriage is when 2 families with adult children of a *marriageable age* have friends or relatives in common, who introduce them to each other with the intent of helping the parents find a *good match* for their children. Many people may also consider this as a business arrangement or as ‘social capital’. Many of these introductions happen at weddings of relatives or friends. Most times horoscopes are exchanged and matched, and then the couple meets each other and decides whether they want to be together or not. All this is done in good faith and trust, but as with most things in life, there are no guarantees. As long as things work out, no one

woman's first choice, but one that might have been 'pre-determined' by other family members, or by the husband's occupation in Canada. I was also aware of the fact that some of these women might hesitate to talk to me since I have not adhered to the *traditional* Indian Hindu way(s) of living and I have openly questioned and confronted the hypocrisy of these so-called *conventional* ways where the men are free to do any-thing they want and desire, whereas, the women are supposed to (and sadly, under any / all circumstances, they do) stay bound to their marital and familial ties (*chains*). But I hoped that when they realized that I would use pseudonyms and delete any details that could identify them so as not to 'ex/pose' their secrets in public, they might be willing to share their stories with me. I silently prayed that the rationale behind my research would make them realize why this research is pertinent and necessary in today's society, and that they would welcome this opportunity to share their/our unique experiences / stories and knowledge(s) of how they/we navigate their/our hyphe-nated currere or course of life. This knowledge could be a living pedagogy (stories to live by/ learn from) not only for the co-participants but also for other new I-M-migrant women, since most of us don't have our mothers and grand-mothers to guide us here in Canada. As Cairns & Silverman (2004) have said,

Women's life stories, mostly unheard, resonate with the evidence of unacknowledged talent, intelligence, perceptiveness, achievement, strength and persistence in the face of often overwhelming life circumstances.

p. x

says anything about such matches. It is only when issues like abuse and dowry crop up, do people start to question the notion of arranged marriages and their significance in this day and age.

Seeking Participants

At one time or another, I have been a member of various organizations within the Indian diaspora and I recruited participants through the community listserv(s) as well as through personal emails with snowball sampling. I emailed a couple of my friends, as well as the representatives of the various cultural organizations like the India-Canada Association (ICA), Indo-Canada Community Centre (ICCC), Ottawa Marathi Mandal (OMM), Gujarati Cultural Association (GCA), and the South India Cultural Association (SICA), and asked them if they would consider participating, and /or forwarding my email to their friends or to members of their group.

*From: Veena Balsawer
To: Organization
Date: 01-01-01
Subject: Looking for participants for a research project on the experiences of Indo-Canadian women*

*Hello,
I am doing my Ph.D. at the University of Ottawa, and I am looking for 8 -10 Indo-Canadian women to participate in my study. I wonder if you might consider participating.
Please find attached a copy of my recruitment text to participants³¹.
I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or need more information please do not hesitate to contact me.
If you know someone who you think might be interested in this study, please feel free to forward them my email.
Thanks in advance.*

*Regards
V*

Then I waited with trepidation.

I went to the labyrinth. I stood at the entrance, and I tried to focus, but...

*Assailed by doubts and fears,
I hovered over the threshold
feeling vulnerable.
Did anyone receive my email?*

³¹ Recruitment Text to Participants -Appendix C

Will anyone respond?
Will they tell me their ho[me] stories?
I paused
I b_r_e_a_t_h_e_d
And I started walking

I remembered how when I got impatient *Amma* used to recite this Marathi devotional song written by Vidyadhar Gokhale:

धीर धरी | धीर धरी | जागृत गिरिधारी³²
Dhir dhari | dhir dhari | Jaagrut Giridhaari

[Have patience / faith | Giridhari (Lord Krishna) is always protecting /watching over you (us).]

I also stumbled upon this reference to Rilke's poem in the works of Fulghum (1997) and Hasebe-Ludt et al (2009) which seemed to speak to me directly:

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1929) in "*Letters to a Young Poet*" ³³

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS4J2FN9kFo>

³³ Downloaded from web <http://www.carrothers.com/rilke4.htmite>

Research Methodology

First winter – a memoir

I arrived in Ottawa in February, in the middle of winter. For someone who had never left Mumbai, and never experienced the severe Canadian winters, getting used to the cold, the wind-chill factor, and the almost empty streets was an experience in itself. I remember how at first, I was even scared to open the front door of our house because of the cold winds. However, when the snow started to fall, I ran out and started ‘playing’ in the snow like a little child experiencing it for the very first time – and I wasn’t very young at all – only young at heart!

Understanding a curriculum lived amidst hyphe-nations

*Currere compels us to focus on the moment—or more accurately perhaps,
on the weaving together of moments into lives*

Sumara & Davis, 1998, p. 84

Both as an insider / outsider, I wanted to talk to other Indo-Canadian women in Ottawa about their experiences of migrating to Canada as adult women, and learning to live in a new country/society with different customs and traditions, and for some perhaps, even a different language. I engaged in complicated conversations with Indo-Canadian women who have lived in Ottawa for 20-30 years, to understand how they /we have learned to navigate their/our hyphe-nated currere with/in these liminal spaces. In some ways, this navigation represents how we have found *our way* or found *our-selves* by *getting lost* in terms of being confused, or not being in control and trying to figure out a life in a new country where their/our existence and their/our knowledge(s) was/is constantly being de/constructed, challenged or questioned – where at first, it even felt as if people were walking and driving on the wrong side of the road! Thus “getting lost as a way of knowing might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” says Lather (2007, p.13), which can also be “difficult knowledge” (Pitt and Britzman, 2003)

where “accepting loss becomes the very force of learning, and what one loves when lovely knowledge is lost is the promise of thinking and doing otherwise” (Lather, 2007, p. 13). I hoped that the live(d) experiences/stories of their/our (im)migrations with/in and out/side homes/not-homes might help me /us understand “how migration influences [our] lives” [and what they/we do about it, and whether] “women tend to feel a greater need to belong to a culture, and tend to mourn the losses associated with immigration” (Kelley, 2013, p.5). Feminist work, says Olsen (2005) “sets the stage for other research, other actions and praxis” (p. 236) and the emerging complexities, and the shifting boundaries / paradigms in women’s experiences, places, and spaces, “emphasize discourse, narrative and text, and experimental writing” (p. 247). In this (re)search, as Denzin (1989) writes, I am not an “objective outsider,” [and I] “incorporate elements of my own life experience[s] when writing about others” (p. 27) thus, my study fits into what he characterizes as an autoethnography. Ellis (2003) explains:

Autoethnography refers to writing [*graphy*] about the personal [*auto*] and its relationship to culture [*ethno*]. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness...Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language.

Dialogue with self and others

For Esgalhado (2003) autoethnography, “speaks to the process the participant undergoes in exploring and examining the formulation of his or her subjectivity [the personal, social, historical, political, metaphoric, lived –and reminisced –aspects]...Autoethnography is never a fixed and static process; rather, it is a maddeningly dynamic, motile, and ever-changing one” (p. 486). Reed-Danahay (1997) defines it as a method, a text / concept, and a self-narrative that “places the self within a social context” (p. 9) and reflects “the postmodern / postcolonial conception of self and society which is one of multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement and of shifting axes of power” (p.1), where the autoethnographer is a “boundary crosser,” and is not completely ‘at home’” (p.4). Thus auto/ethnography is pertinent to my research since I quest/ion if it is possible for I-M-migrant women, in my case, the Indo-Canadian women, to feel completely at ho[me] any/where in the world after they have experienced hyphe-nations. Or perhaps Trinh (2011) is right in saying that “the one named a ‘stranger’ will never really fit in” (p. 30).

Ellis (2004) writes that the autoethnographers are objects of their research, or characters in their stories, who gaze “backward and forward, inward and outward, [where] distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition” (p. 37).

For Holman Jones (2005), autoethnography is:

a blurred genre...it is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation...making a text present...demanding attention and participation...refusing closure or

categorization...believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts *is* to change the world.

p. 765

My hope of *changing the wor(l)d* through my research, is to showcase the live(d) and living-through experiences or the “curriculum of lives” (Clandinin, 2013) of the Indo-Canadian women, who I feel are *in/visible* or *absent* or *silent* on the so-called multi-cultural landscape and also to de/construct the (mis)representations that constitute the notion of the “universal Indian woman” (Sharma, 2009, p. 119).

Bricolage - Auto/ethnographic performance texts

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) call the present moment in qualitative research as “the blurred genres phase” (p. 4), where the qualitative researcher is a “*bricoleur* (a maker of quilts, or, in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages), who learns to borrow from many different disciplines” (p. 4-5). For my hybrid story-quilt, I draw from “Narrative Inquiry” (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), “Poetic Inquiry” (Butler-Kisber, 2010), “Performance [auto]ethnography” (Alexander, 2000) and narrative “literary transactions” (Rosenblatt, 1982). Kincheloe (2005) tells us that bricolage exists out of the “complexity of the lived world” (p. 324), and addresses questions such as “what it means to be human,” where the *researcher-as-bricoleur* searches for better ways “to connect with and address the ontology of the human existential situation with all its pain, suffering, joy, and desire” (p. 348). Employing methodological, theoretical, interpretive, political, thematic, arts-informed, and narrative dimensions; and drawing from divergent forms of research, “bricoleurs address the complexities of social, cultural, psychological, and educational domains, [and] explore the different

perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized in relation to formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). In their work, says Harper (1987), bricoleurs “define and extend themselves” (p. 75); the bricoleur’s life story, or biography “may be thought of as bricolage” (p. 92).

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us in their book *Narrative Inquiry*: “life...is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (p. 17). I use bricolage to knit/quilt/weave *our* - the Indo-Canadian women’s bricoles / narrative fragments together and I intersperse these stories with our arti(e)facts. For Cairns and Silverman (2004) “the act of keeping a particular thing [artefact] is always an act of self-definition in which the object represents both an aspect of the self and a way into self-knowledge” (p. 1). I also weave in references to texts, music, movies and pictures that showcase this diasporic experience because “narrative inquiry is, always, multilayered and many stranded” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xvii) and researchers always seem to “enter research relationships in the midst of stories / lives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43) (researchers’ lives as well as the participants’ lives). The quilt metaphor makes it possible to incorporate our different voices (like different textures / layers in a quilt), different perspectives and points of view along with the literary and multi-modal/textured texts. The quilt also functions as a dialogic text or an “autoethnographic performance text” which can move from “the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural and presumes an active audience by creating space(s) for give-and-take [a dialogue / a transaction] between reader and writer” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7), between “the researcher and the participant [co-researcher]” (Clandinin, 2013) allowing for narrative and “efferent or aesthetic

transactions” (Rosenblatt, 1982), and for “new modes of thinking, teaching, and learning” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 347).

Performing a Métissage – braiding the live(d) experiences

Performing a métissage of texts, either in print, electronic format, or in a live performance is a singular and collective act of re/creation

Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 10

Finally I braid or weave this auto/ethnographic quilt (story threads), by drawing on the notion of “métissage” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009), as a site for writing and surviving in the fragmented, *messy* “interval between different cultures, [homelands], and languages” (Lionnet, 1989, p. 1). Furthermore, “as research, literary métissage [braided autobiographical texts] makes dialogue possible which [hopefully] leads to understanding about the self and other[s] and generates insights about the world and our place in it” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009, p. 38). Since the “locus of métissage is an inhabited historical place which returns the reader to the conflicted sites of home and not-home” (Ibid, p. 37-38), it blends in with my research study about the notion of be/longing and be/coming amidst liminal hyphe-nated spaces and places.

Making a saree-quilt / Godhadi [गोधडी] : a memoir

Amma always wore sarees [saris]. She would recycle her old sarees into Godhadis / quilts. She would start by joining a couple of cotton sarees together. The batting / filling for these would be Aajji’s old white handloom sarees³⁴. One year, during the Diwali break from school, Amma taught me to make a saree quilt. Then we also

³⁴ My Aajji, who had become a widow at a young age, had shaved her head and only wore white handloom sarees (like the widows in the movie ‘Water’ by Deepa Mehta).

made one with the remnants of all my dress [frock] pieces from my childhood that she had kept. The saree quilts at speciality / Fair Trade stores like the Ten Thousand Villages, remind me of Amma's home-made Godhadis.



A catcher, a Story-catcher, a collector, a Bricoleur

Life hangs on a narrative thread. This thread is a braid of stories that inform us about who we are, and where we come from, and where we might go

Baldwin, 2005, p. 3

As I wait (albeit impatiently) to hear from *some-one* and to collect *some-one's* story, I realize that I have always been a collector / a gatherer: from oral stories and songs, to story books, to stones and shells on the *Juhu Beach*³⁵ in *Santacruz* (the suburb in Bombay / Mumbai where I was born and raised). One of my earliest childhood memories is of gathering the flowers³⁶ of the Drumstick tree (*Moringa oleifera*) in the early mornings. I would collect them in a big handkerchief, and *Amma* would cook a special Konkani curry called *Kholmbo* or *sambar*



³⁵ <http://www.mapsofindia.com/mumbai/places-of-interest/beaches/juhu-beach.html> - Juhu Beach lies in the suburbs of Mumbai. To the west of Juhu Beach is the Arabian Sea and to its east is Santacruz (the suburb I grew up in).

³⁶ <http://www.flowersofindia.net/catalog/slides/Drumstick%20Tree.html>

with it. When I see drumstick pods (Konkani name: *Mashinga saang* | माशिन्गा सांग) in the Indian grocery stores here, I am transported back to those childhood days.

On the eve of any big festival, my girlfriends and I would go around our neighbourhood known as *the Colony* (our Co-operative Housing Society) and gather flowers from all the neighbouring gardens. We would then sit and sort through the many varieties of Chrysanthemums, Jasmine, Marigolds, Plumeria, and Rose³⁷ and we would make garlands to adorn the deities (idols). The most important festival at our place was the Ganapati / Ganesh festival which depending on the lunar calendar, falls somewhere in the months of August / September. We used to bring the Ganesh idol at home with much fanfare and Aajji and I would sit and make/weave intricate garlands with all the flowers that my *Pappa* would bring from the market. We would string these flowers into smaller garlands to decorate our braids.



Pictures (from google) of garlands made from different flowers

³⁷ Indian names for these flowers are in brackets: Chrysanthemums (*Sevanti*), varieties of Jasmine, (*Jai, Jui, Chameli, Madanban, Mogra, Sayali, Kunda*), Marigolds (*Zendu or Genda*), Plumeria (*Champa*), and Rose (*Gulab*)

As an avid knitter / crocheter, I collect all kinds of threads / yarns, in the hopes of knitting or crocheting different scarves, sweaters, and other garments sometime in the un/foreseeable future. I am also a member of different knitting groups where I share knitting stories and discuss patterns, yarns, needle size, the ‘tension’ of my knitting projects with other knitters. Thus it was interesting to read Sommer’s (2009) reflections on conducting qualitative research where she compares the research process to that of “gathering wool” for a project:

In order to knit anything, someone has to first gather the wool, or gather the data.

One must choose which particular sheep will contribute the wool and how they will be tended. With no disrespect intended, I envisioned the participants as the sheep and I saw the time spent developing the protocol as part of the tending process. Then the sheep are shorn and the wool must be gathered. The sheep give an essential part of themselves to the process. One might even say they contribute the essence of who they are. In the same way, interview participants contributed an essential portion of themselves to the developing narrative

p. 19

You’ve got mail!

Within a few days of sending out the emails, I received these replies:

*To: Veena
From: ABC
Date: 01-01-01
Subject: research criteria*

*Hi Veena
Congrats on pursuing your Ph.D.! How exciting. I would be interested in participating in your research. However, I am not sure that I fit your criteria. I was born in India, but only was there for 10 mos. I was raised in N. America.
Please let me know.
Thanks.
ABC*

*To: Veena
From: XYZ
Date: 01-01-01
Subject: Research study*

Hello Veena

I was forwarded your proposal by SN and I have read through the participant letter. I would be happy to participate, except for the fact that I have lived in Ottawa since 2012. I lived in Montreal for 17 years before coming to Ottawa. Given this, I am not sure that I would fit your requirements. Please let me know if you can include me and we can discuss the other details if I do.

All the best!

It looks like an interesting project and I would like to read your thesis when you are done.

XYZ

As much as I was excited by receiving these emails, I was a little disappointed since these women did not meet my interview criteria. A couple of *Aunties*,³⁸ who are regular patrons at the library where I work on a part-time basis, had seen my email on the list-servs and they said they would have loved to help me with my research. Some of them have lived in Canada for over 50-60 years and thus did not fit the criteria I was looking for. I have known these Aunties since I came to Canada in 1991 and some of them have been instrumental in building a strong Indo-Canadian community within Ottawa.

Then a few days later, I received another email:

Hi Veena,

Just received this mail from my friend Gowri. I would love to be a research participant for your PhD Study. The research work will be very interesting. I did my graduate studies in India and Women's demographic studies always interested me.

Have been in Ottawa for the last 33 years so would be able to give you insights of my observations. So, if you could use my experiences, I am there for you.

Let me know when and where you could meet me. I work at any-place, so if you need to meet me in person, you could come over to our building and we could meet in our cafeteria and have a chat during our lunch break.

Best wishes & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Devi

³⁸ Even in Canada, I follow my cultural tradition of addressing Indo-Canadian men and women, who are older than me, as Uncles and Aunties respectively.

***Recruiting/ Inviting my participants: The cast, char|actors [kalaakar / कलाकार],
storytellers***

*It will take a long time for living cannot be told, not merely told: living is not livable.
Understanding, however, is creating, and living, such an immense gift that thousands
of people benefit from each past or present life being lived*

Trinh, 1989, p. 119

Through snowball sampling I managed to *gather* eleven (11) participants to join me on my quest, my yatra. I have (re)named them after the many Goddesses (and their attributes) in the Hindu religion: ***Gowri*** [गौरी], ***Devi*** [देवी], ***Shreesha*** [श्री], ***Aarya*** [आर्या], ***Maanasi*** [मानसी],

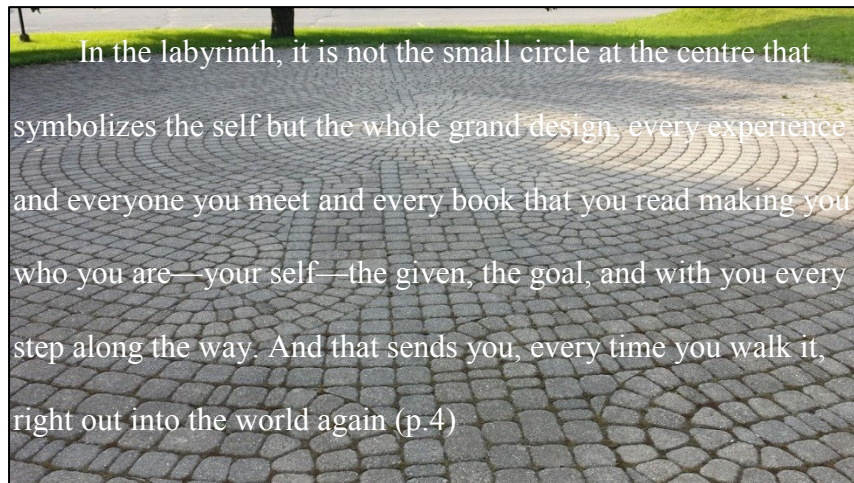
Kanak [कनक], ***Padma*** [पद्मा], ***Gomati*** [गोमती], ***Aparna*** [अपर्णा], ***Maya*** [माया], ***Roopa*** [रूपा].³⁹

The first woman to tell me her story was *Gowri*. We belong to the same community and we have known each other since I came to Canada. She was willing to help me right from the beginning and she also forwarded my email to a couple of her friends; one of them happened to be *Devi*. *Shreesha* responded to my email that was posted on one of the community list-servs. I had volunteered with *Aarya* and *Maanasi* at various cultural events, and they are also committee members of one of the organizations, so I emailed them to see if they would like to participate. I used to see *Kanak* at the library, and when I told her about my research topic she agreed to tell me her story. *Padma* and I had volunteered with the Spelling Bee of Canada for many years. She told me that by pursuing my Ph.D. I was, in a way, fulfilling her dream and so she wanted to share her story. *Gomati* speaks my mother-tongue too, and I have known her since I came to

³⁹ All names are pseudonyms. I have named them after the many Hindu Goddesses, or their attributes: *Gowri* (peaceful Goddess Parvati), *Devi* (Divine / Goddess), *Shreesha* (beautiful like Goddess Lakshmi), *Aarya* (strong and noble like Parvati), *Maanasi* (intellectual like Goddess Saraswati), *Kanak* (precious like gold), *Padma* (pure like the Lotus flower), *Gomati* (the pretty one, also a tributary of the Ganges / Ganga River), *Aparna* (another name for Goddess Parvati), *Maya* (another name for Goddess Durga, Buddha's mother was also named Maya. It also means illusion), *Roopa* (the Beautiful one).

Canada, but we had lost touch over the years. When she heard I was doing my research, she volunteered to help. She forwarded my email to her friend *Aparna*. My colleague at work thought that I should meet *Maya* and *really* listen to her story, so she forwarded my email to Maya, through whom, I met *Roopa* and thus, I had eleven (11) participants⁴⁰.

I walk the labyrinth at the Bells Corners United Church frequently, and it is a *classical* 11-circuit labyrinth (which is patterned after the famous Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth in France), so for me every woman's story corresponds to a circuit on this labyrinth. Nancy Malone (2003) in *Walking a literary labyrinth: A spirituality of reading* says that:



When I heard from these women, I emailed them the consent form so that they could read it and if they had any questions or doubts in their minds, they could ask me when we met. I also gave them a choice of places where we could meet to have our conversations –a coffee shop [Tim Hortons / Starbucks], the University, or their homes. Most of my participants invited me to

⁴⁰ This was not a religious study, yet, there was a suggestion from one of the committee members that I should identify my participant's religious affiliations. In order to protect my participants' identities, I will suffice it to say that majority of them were raised as Hindus, even though in Canada some of them only visit a non-denominational spiritual centre and not the temple. My other participants belong to religions that are offshoots of the Hindu religion.

their own places, two (2) of them work downtown so, we met at the University, I met one (1) of them at Tim Hortons and one (1) came to meet me at the Ottawa Public Library where I booked a meeting room. After the initial pleasantries were conducted, I gave them an overview of the research, asked them if they had any questions for me, and then we signed the consent forms. I also took their permission to digitally record their interviews and told them that I would be making some notes. Then I gave them a copy of my open-ended, semi-structured interview questions and we had our in-depth complicated conversation [*Appendix C*]. My hope was that the participants would, as Maxwell (2005) states, “bring their own knowledge to bear on the questions in ways that you / [I] might never have anticipated” (p. 92). As a token of appreciation for so/journing with me on this yatra, I offered my participants a gift certificate to one of the local Indian grocery stores.

Even though most of us (Indo-Canadians) can, and do speak English, we (my participants and I) grew up speaking multiple *vernacular* languages and dialects in India. I was sensitive to the fact that some of these women might feel more comfortable answering the questions in a language other than English. Since I speak about 4-5 Indian languages (Hindi, Marathi, Konkani, Bengali and a little Gujarati) I would be able to translate their interviews in English. But all my participants chose to answer the questions in English and only used idioms and phrases from the Indian *vernacular* languages / dialects for emphasis. I feel that the sentiments expressed in the *vernacular* dialects add to the richness of my hyphe-nated bricolage –métissage making it an “arts-based qualitative inquiry” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p.230).

I digitally recorded our conversations and made notes, and I also took pictures of some of the artifacts that they shared with me. Initially, I had planned on scheduling three (3) interviews with the participants. In the first interview, I would meet with them to sign the consent forms and

then have our in-depth conversation to understand how they/ we create our ho[me]s and our identities, with/in the hyphe-nated spaces that we now in/habit. The second meeting would be after I had transcribed their interviews to ascertain that I had ‘authentically’ captured their words, their emotions and their sentiments. We would meet for the third and final time so that I could show them how I had braided / woven their conversation into my literary métissage. I had also told them that they could phone me, or email me with questions or ideas they may have pertaining to the research questions which I would then analyze as part of the bricoles or conversation bits. Our conversations lasted from 1 hour to 2.5 hours and they all said that I could email them the transcripts and they would let me know if I had missed anything. Thus in the end, I only met them twice, once for our conversation and then to show them how I had utilized their conversation-bits into my thesis.

As I have mentioned before, when I was a newcomer to Ottawa, I was very active in the community – teaching children in the International School Programs, participating in music / drama and other cultural functions, volunteering in public schools in the hopes of getting a job – and I had met some of these women at various community events. But over the years, and especially after my divorce⁴¹, I had lost touch with most of them. As a *young and single /child-less divorced woman*, my life took on a different trajectory where I had to literally learn to survive on my own, and thus at times I have felt (and still feel) that except for the fact that we are all from India, I have very little in common with a lot of Indo-Canadian women. So when we met

⁴¹ In my experience, even though divorce has become quite common in India in recent years, it is still taboo to discuss it, and the woman is still blamed for it. I find many Indo-Canadians in Canada to be very traditional and they behave as if getting a divorce is like committing the ultimate sin. As a divorced woman, I very seldom get invited to social events and if and when I attend some functions by myself, people seem un-sure as to how to respond to me, and at times some of them will not even acknowledge my presence. It is also my experience that people in India and Indo-Canadians in Canada seem to know what to do when there is an illness or a death in a family, but when it comes to divorce, there is some sort of denial and complete silence around the very word. Thus with no family around, I have learned that unless one cultivates friendships with non-Indian friends, life can be extremely lonely for a ‘single’/ child-less divorced Indian woman in Canada.

for our conversation, a couple of them who only knew me by my married *last* name were surprised to see *me*, because apparently they thought I had left Ottawa after my divorce. But once we started chatting we were able to establish a rapport perhaps because of our shared *I-m-migrant experiences* as Indo-Canadians, or may be because I treated this more as a “conversation” (Sanger, 2003) instead of as an interview or data gathering and thus there was a “great deal of give-and-take in the discussion” (Sanger, 2003, p. 31).

In their article *On being an Insider-outsider in Qualitative Research*, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) state:

The benefit to being a member of the group one is studying is acceptance. One’s membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. One has a starting point (the commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to “outsiders.” Participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel, “You are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don’t understand).” [Brackets in the original]

p. 58

I also felt that my previous experience of conducting in-depth interviews, during my graduate studies, both during my course-work, as well as for my M.A. thesis, and my expertise in facilitating focus groups and sessions at work and at school helped me during these conversations because I was able to present a *professional façade* when there were a few awkward and surprising (sad) moments. Even though initially a couple of them were surprised that it was me, luckily, they seemed to trust me with their stories and had “faith that I meant

well” (Hoschild, 1983, p. xvi, as cited in Sanger, 2003) and I was greatly honoured and touched by this. In a strange way, it made me conscious of the *power / entitlement* I seemed to have earned as a scholar-researcher – “the ‘I’ of the ethnographer as a privileged eye” (Behar, 1996, p. 21)—because they had agreed to meet me all by themselves (even when they were not very sure as to my *true* identity) and even when I went to their place we had a one-on-one conversation without any interference from other family members. I was also conscious of this *entitlement* throughout our conversations, because apart from 2 or 3 participants, none of the other women turned the researcher gaze / lens back at me. They said they were really happy to help me and they just answered all the questions.

The thing about most Indian families is that when you go to visit someone, as a sign of respect or courtesy, (*or perhaps even curiosity*), other family members will come and join in the conversation or just stay in the room, and depending on the nature of your visit, this can be both a good and /or a bad thing. Thus, in my previous encounters with some of these women, their husbands and /or their children were always with them, and sometimes the husbands acted as spokespersons for their wives and that is the reason I was surprised when they agreed to meet me all by themselves. Some of them mentioned that their husbands had read the call for participants, and the consent letter which I had emailed them once they had replied to the recruitment email. A couple of them also told me that the detailed explanation of the research process helped them with their decision to participate, because, as a family they perceived that there was no problem / harm in participating.

An interview observation

During our conversations I noticed that as soon as they had answered the 1st question, my participants would ask me something like “Is that ok?” or “Is this correct?” or “Is this really going to help you?” or “Is this what you were looking for?” and “I can’t believe I have been speaking for so long –I hope you can find something in it!” I had to re-assure them that there were no right or wrong answers, and that I only wanted to hear about their experiences.

Who speaks on behalf of whom?

I want to re-read the interview, not as a method of gathering information, but as a vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society.

Denzin, 2001, p.24

Performative narratives potentially create spaces for marginalized voices to be heard, for dialogues to transform, for the integration of the cognitive and the affective to be recognized, for literary and lived connections to emerge.

McMillan & Price, 2010, p. 162

As an insider-outsider, I am conscious of the fact that I might *silence* or *over-shadow* my participants’ voices / identities with my “signature and voice” (Clandinin& Connelly, 2000, p. 147). Therefore, I have decided to re-create / perform / braid / “métissage” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009) my participants’ unique live(d) experiences and narratives by using a Readers Theatre-like script by drawing on the notion of “found poetry” or “generated poetry” [which is] “to use only the words of the participant(s) to create a poetic rendition of a story or phenomenon [to recreate lived experience]” (Butler-Kisber, 2002 / 2010, p. 232).

In her article, *Artful portrayals in Qualitative Inquiry*...Butler-Kisber (2002) explains:

In the last decade there has been a burgeoning interest in stretching the boundaries of narrative reporting to include other literary genres (reader's theatre, poetry, drama, musical drama, and hypertext), as well as nontextual or visual modes of representation (collage, quilts, portraits, drawings, photographs, film, and video)...[T]hese non-traditional forms can help disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional lived responses [transactions] that bring reader/viewer closer to the work...and contribute positively to existing educational practices.

p. 230

Since my intention is to braid these artful poetic experiences using the concept of "métissage" (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009), I feel that the two ideas are complementary because:

Métissage is a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities, an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis.

p. 9

My literary métissage is also like a free-form story-quilt, a "Crazy Quilt" (Otto, 1992), woven from the bricoles or the "dropped threads" (Shields & Anderson, 2001) or utterances / narrative fragments of the live(d)-through experiences of my participants. I find that when people talk, they have a unique cadence / tempo to their speech and I am also interested in the suspended conversations, the silences or the s-p-a-c-e-s between the utterances and I wanted to capture it here. As someone who loves poetry, theatre and drama, and being influenced by works

such as *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, or the (musical) one-act plays that I watched in my childhood like *One Sunday Morning* | एका रविवारची सकाळ by the famous Marathi dramatist P.L. Deshpande, or the vibrant and *passionate* street performances and theatre scenes in Bombay (*Bollywood*), Carolyn Ellis' *Ethnographic I*, and the life writing or *métissage* performances by Cynthia Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, and Carl Leggo, I depict my participants' responses as a performance. Since this is an auto/ethnography, this "performance of *métissage*" (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, p. 10) can also be considered as a performance [auto]ethnography.

Alexander (2000) writes:

Performance ethnography is literally the staged re-enactment of ethnographically derived notes. This approach to studying and staging culture works towards lessening the gap between a perceived and actualized sense of self and the other. Practitioners of performance ethnography acknowledge the fact that culture travels in the stories, practices, and desires of those who engage it. By utilising an experiential method such as performance ethnography, those who seek understanding of other cultures and lived experiences are offered a body-centred method of knowing.

p. 411

He adds that:

Autoethnography engages ethnographical analysis of personally lived experience...using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other* [italics in the original]. Thus, as a form of performance ethnography, it is designed to engage a locus of embodied reflexivity using lived experience as a specific cultural site that offers social commentary and cultural critique (p. 422).

Sifting and sorting through the conversation threads

I had conversations with eleven (11) Indo-Canadian women between January 2014 and August 2014 and the conversations lasted from an hour to over 2.5 hours in some cases. The transcriptions and notes from all these conversations run over 160 pages. My challenge after all these complicated conversations was in deciding how to do justice to these women's stories / narratives within the limits of my dissertation. Butler-Kisber (2010) tells us that there are two phases of working with the field-texts or the interviews and she calls them the "coarse-grained phase" and the "fine-grained phase" (p. 30). The *coarse-grained phase* involves going over the interviews and the notes. After I transcribed the interviews, I sent the transcripts to my participants to confirm their stories and asked for clarifications on some points. I started to think of how to re-present all these stories in their own voices and started to look for common themes within the conversations. I also like to think of this phase from the perspective of "gathering wool" (Sommer, 2011), where once the wool [data] is gathered, "it is sorted and then combed or carded so that fibres begin to align in the same direction...similar to the initial coding process" (p. 20).

In the *fine-grained phase* Butler-Kisber (2010) says that "chunks of field-texts are reassembled into more refined categories, and are broken down into others and these are assigned and reassigned names and codes" (p. 31). In my case, I went back and listened to the taped interviews and highlighted conversation-bits in my transcripts that would portray the unique characteristics and experiences of each of my participant. Sommer (2011) calls this "spinning of the wool into yarn: [Coding the data]...after which skeins of wool or thematic codes are developed. Dyeing the wool is next...Next comes the shaping of the wool or the data, into a recognizable garment" (p. 20). For me, this was like knitting or weaving the 'garment' / quilt.

Each participant's response was like a thread from a different skein that I needed to first un/skein or un/ravel or transcribe and then weave / braid / métissage with the other story-threads. Each of the questions I asked my participants is a theme / pattern in my research journey and “a performance of métissage” (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, p. 10) or a “themed cluster of poems that showcases the tentativeness of individual interpretation [of their experience]” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 95). The multi-layered performances can also be viewed as a métissage of the ‘nested set of lives in [the midst of] which each of us lives’ (Clandinin, 2013, p.44).



Mapping / Designing my auto/ethnographical métissage

In the first métissage “*Looking back: a reminiscence*” my co-participants introduce themselves and reminisce about their early experiences as newcomers in Canada. *Storying the Storycatcher* is my narrative where I reveal the reason for embarking on this research yatra to find Ho[me]. The second métissage “*I-M-migrant(s)*” dwells further into the immigrant experiences of the Indo-Canadian women in terms of ho[me], be/long/ing and I-identity. Métissage Three is called “*Trishanku Dilemma*” where we per/form this notion of living *in-*

between, or living in hyphe-nated liminal spaces / places which are both home and not-home. “*A home by any other name*” is the fourth métissage where the participants define their notions of home and talk about their unique experiences of making a home in Canada. In the fifth métissage we talk about “*Our Treasures*” or the souvenirs of our lives and the reasons why we hold on to them. “*Lingering Steps*” is the sixth métissage where I ask my participants for any final thoughts and I conclude our sojourn. But this is where my ‘*real*’ quest, my (so)journ/aling begins with my “*Reflections*” and the final weaving of my story-quilt, my bricolage- métissage.

Introductions [परिचय / Parichay]

*To produce their full effect, words must, indeed, be chanted rhythmically,
in cadences, off cadences*

Trinh, 1989, p. 122

I introduce my (co)participants not in the order I met them, but according to the year they arrived in Canada (1971 - 1997). I have used pseudonyms instead of their given names to protect their identities. I have named them after the many Goddesses⁴² (or their ‘divine’ / spiritual attributes) in the Hindu religion. As I was listening to their stories, I realized that our (mine / their) I-M-migrant journeys had begun with...

*A marriage certificate
a one-way ticket
packed memories
ho[me] away from ho[me]
now eternally in transit*

⁴² In my culture, people are named after the many Gods and Goddesses, or their many characteristics hoping the child will live up to those qualities. Sometimes children are also named after the different seasons, or the different ragas (melodious formulas) in the Indian musical tradition, or according to the time of birth i.e. Dawn [Usha] or Night [Nisha].

...and like the emotional mother in P. Sawalaram's famous Marathi folk song, all our mothers (and fathers) had sent us off with their blessing to go and live a happy married life in our new homes:

गंगा जमुना डोळ्यात उभ्या का | जा मुली जा, दिल्या घरी तू सुखी रहा⁴³

Ganga Jamuna dolyat ubhya ka? | ja muli ja dilya ghari tu sukhi raha

[Ganga and Jamuna (Yamuna) are two holy rivers in India. The mother of the bride, who is herself emotional, is asking her daughter not to sob or 'cry rivers' as she blesses her to go and live happily in her new home.]

Métissage One: Looking back: a reminiscence

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women

Trinh, 1989, p. 121

Q.1 "Departure from the homeland and migration to a strange country in order to settle and start a new way of life in a different climate and unfamiliar surroundings is a dramatic step to take" says Helen Ralston (1996). When did you move to Canada? What was the reason for this move to Canada?

I call this first métissage "Looking back: a reminiscence" where I ask my participants to reminisce or to cast a glance back on their very first experiences in Canada. Clandinin (2013) reminds us that

Narrative inquirers always enter into research relationships in the midst...in the midst of researchers' ongoing personal and professional lives... [and] in the midst of

⁴³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ACO_7uaN_0

participants' lives. Their lives and ours are shaped by attending to past, present, and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives.

p. 43

I present my participants according to the year they arrived in Canada, although, when I met with each of them there was no pattern / sequence as such to our meetings. We met when it was convenient for them to have a conversation with me. Once we decided on the time and the place, I would go with my questions, my notepad, my voice recorder and my blackberry as a backup recorder. I would hand them the questionnaire and we would begin. We would have our conversation and then sometimes I would stay for tea, coffee and snacks. I have used pseudonyms instead of their given names.

Roopa (1971)

My husband was already here as a student

he was home on a visit when I met him.

We got married and came together

within a month of meeting.

I was quite aware of the world

I did my Masters in India and

I was exposed to the Western⁴⁴ thought,

and Western philosophies and Western ways of life.

So it wasn't as much of a culture shock.

The culture shock was how provincial Canadians were

how absolutely uninterested in the rest of the world they were.

I found the people very hard to adjust

I think they found it harder

because they didn't expect someone from India

⁴⁴ In this context "Western" implies ideologies which are different than Indian or Eastern ideologies.

*to walk in here,
 speak English with an English accent,
 and be better at it than they were!
 I came in the winter of '71!
 I arrived the day they had 48 inches or 45 inches [of snow] in Montreal
 Would you believe that?
 That's the year we got T-shirts from The Ottawa Citizen saying:
 "I survived the winter of 1971!"
 So the first thing was to go buy a pair of boots.*



Maya (1973):

*I came to Canada in '73 November
 I turned 27 in December
 I was excited to start a new life
 I had a dream
 –A secret dream!
 I wanted an education.
 I got married at 17, and had children
 so my dream was that Canada will give me an education
 –a higher education,
 mingled with that of course was a lot
 of anxiety and fear.*

One always has to live with
 hope. Without it, how can one
 carry on any kind of struggle?
 (Trinh, Minh-ha with Homi
 Bhabha, 1999, in Painted
 Power)

*At the time one doesn't realize
 so one lives with a knot in the belly.
 The first thing was snow you know*

*it was alien.
 I had seen snow but not lived with it.
 It was the same language
 English language
 but the intonations were different
 so got into a lot of funny episodes.
 As a woman,
 I mainly came to educate the children
 hoping I would also get an education.
 And I did.
 I joined Carleton University as a mature student.
 Coming to Canada is 1 (one) immigration,
 but at 40,
 going to Carleton is the 2nd immigration
 and life after university is real life
 because University is a citadel unto itself
 and it is great fun
 but it is not the real world.
 That is my story in a nutshell.*



Kanak (1978):

*I moved because my husband moved here.
 So, it was not a choice
 He is here, you follow him
 that is the thinking there.
 I was still doing my Bachelors when
 we got married*

*I stayed back to finish my studies
and I came in '78 September.
You come with the feeling that this is the land of opportunity
but we are used to 'things will be done for you'!
It was pleasant as well as testing time for both of us.
University was a very multicultural place.
I took lots of cooking courses
and made lots of friends.
I was a big cook for all these boys
who would come and eat.
Everybody was suffering in the same way
no groceries, no food, somebody's visa is up...
It was good to see all that
because we come from a different background
it was a learning process.
In India I did not struggle.
Not at all!
I didn't know any cooking
so it was a shock when I realized I had to cook and do laundry.
You know how we are brought up
being a Brahmin girl and all.
Oh man!
This was a good shock
People don't understand what the caste system is in India!
Here it is a different world.
You have to think of everything here.*



Devi (1981):

*My husband came to do his Masters in 1980
and I joined him in 1981
with our child.*

We came here because of my grandmother.

*My uncle lives here so
she had a taste of what life here.*

*When she came back to India
she asked my husband to try out places
in the States or anywhere.*

'Go abroad' she says, and 'enjoy God's creation.'

*We were young at the time
and we just wanted to see something different
we thought 'Why not try?'*

*I feel it was a smoother transition for us
knowing that my uncle was here.*

*I think language probably matters too and
being able to speak in English is one barrier out of the way.*

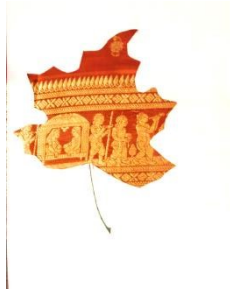
**Padma (1982):**

I moved to Canada in 1982 on Sept 21st

I moved because I got married.

*My husband was doing his Ph.D. in Canada
that is the reason I moved.*

*Since ours was an arranged marriage,
I didn't have a say.
When you move somewhere you are not mentally prepared.
September was kind of a cold month.
In India the monsoons end in September
and it is a pleasant month
but when you come here,
it is raining, and it is cold, and
you are here in a strange country on the 15th floor.
You don't know your husband
you don't know anyone around
and you are on the 15th floor
in a bachelor apartment.
When the wind blows,
it makes noises
then you look at the door and the windows
Are they properly locked or not?
And you are sitting there
and thinking 'Why am I here?'
What am I supposed to do?
You are at home and not at home!
Your physical body is somewhere
And your mental, emotional...
and your soul is somewhere else thinking all the time
What is the next step? How do I do it?
Being a student's wife you cannot do anything
You were not allowed to work!
No cell phone or anything then.
It was really really hard.*



Gomati (1983):

*Our ancestors had moved from Kashmir to Karnataka
 When we visited Kashmir
 I had prayed and wished
 I could be in this kind of place
 I never imagined my wish would be fulfilled.
 I landed in Montreal on 7th May, 1983
 and came to Ottawa to settle down in Kanata.
 I came here on a fiancée sponsorship
 and I got married on 26th July 1983.
 From that time my life came with a basketful of
 happiness, sorrows, challenges,
 and very interesting experiences
 I was a youngster at that time
 23 years old.
 In the beginning it was definitely a culture shock
 I was not sure what my role is
 and what are the things I am supposed to do
 because I was going to be a newly married person
 and here I have had such an active life in Mumbai,
 and here I am
 landing somewhere
 don't know what this place holds for me
 and I am living with this so-called husband*

*who is quite a stranger to me.
 My husband would say:
 'Don't just sit around,
 Take the bus and travel wherever you want.'
 So I started taking the bus
 I would take a CAA / OC Transpo map
 and decide where I want to go
 I kept myself busy as I was trying to find out
 'Where do I fit in this country which we have chosen'?*



Aarya (1984):

*I moved here in 1984
 to be with my husband.
 At the same time I knew it was going to be
 different --
 The climate, the people, the customs --
 Everything!
 Even though you know this,
 it does not really prepare you for what comes
 your way.
 I considered myself well educated
 but it still left quite a few gaps culturally
 What is the norm here?
 What people expect of you?
 What people think of you?
 There is a big gap.*

The first few years these émigré women lived in their adopted countries were by far the most intense in terms of learning and adaptation. As new immigrants they were faced daily with the task of trying to understand what was expected of them.
 (Kelley, 2013, in *Accidental Immigrants and the Search for home...p.81*)

*When I was in India,
I was working with people from various nations
but they were in India.
So their attitude,
their way of behaviour with me was different.
When I came here,
I needed to make the adjustment which is as it should be
because I am coming to their country.
So I had adopted some of the customs
But the first few months were a little difficult.
Getting myself oriented was difficult.
I had never really walked around in the snow,
or taken a subway,
so trying to learn these things was a bit of a challenge.
Not that people are nasty
but you feel like a stupid person standing there
because you don't know where to go.*



Aparna (1988):

I moved to Canada in 1988.

It wasn't my wish.

It was my ex-husband who made me move

it was his dream to come to North America

because of him I have to come.

I have to sacrifice my life,

give away all my bank balance,

and the love for my parents

I tried to make him happy,

but unfortunately, I couldn't succeed in that

So I made my own life myself with my children

Yes! And I am proud of myself.

Even though it is a different weather,

different culture,

different everything,

I feel in Canada I got a lot of help as a woman

which I wouldn't have had in India.

There are lots of Community centres

and in Canada everybody helps women.

**Gowri (1989):**

I came to Canada on March 1st 1989

The reason I guess...

economic reasons, like job

India wasn't the place for people who had a good education.

*India wasn't the place.
 There were no jobs available as such
 and that's the reason we moved.
 It was just for a better life I have to say.
 We were in Toronto for a few months
 and we moved to Ottawa when my husband got a government job.*



Shreesha (1989):

*I moved to Canada on Dec, 9th, 1989
 it was the coldest day of the year
 minus 18 (-18 degrees C)
 I remember the temperature very clearly.
 Leaving the country was very traumatic
 and that was the first time I left India.
 So the moment I sat in the plane,
 I started crying.
 I was only 22 ½ - 23 years old.
 Back home,
 I did my Master's degree
 In 1989 I had my convocation
 and I got married.
 I did not know much cooking at all then
 My mom did everything for me
 so every kind of experiment that I have done,*

*or learned, about life and living,
 everything is here.
 The first year was very exciting
 I had never seen snow in my life.
 'Why are all the doors of the stores closed?'
 'Where are the people?'
 I slowly started getting used to this place
 But it is not always easy
 it takes time to get adjusted to a place
 you have to learn things faster here
 nobody is going to sit and spoon-feed you.
 Going to the Indian grocery store was very exciting
 it was like a trip to India.
 Every weekend
 I looked forward to picking up the phone
 and talking to my parents.
 There was no email
 and phone calls were very expensive in those days.*



Maanasi (1997):

*I moved to Canada in 1997
 I followed my husband
 He came here one year before me
 We thought that it would be a better future for us
 Better opportunities*

*Back in India there are less opportunities for people.
 Therefore we thought:
 'Let's try. If we don't fit in there we can always come back'
 My husband was here so I just followed him
 I didn't think much about it
 I was a Naturopathic doctor
 I knew it wouldn't be easy for me to practice over here
 but I thought 'ok, let's go there and try.'
 My husband's brother was there
 so it was not hard to come to a new country
 where I don't know anyone.
 We knew we will have support.
 It was not like we need to find a home right away
 so it was easier to move.*



Storying the Storycatcher: My narrative

As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller

Ellis, 2009, p. 13

*As narrative inquirers, we become part of participants' lives and they part of ours.
 Therefore, our lives –and who we are and are becoming, on our and their landscapes
 –are also under study*

Clandinin, 2013, p. 30

As I listen to my participants reminisce about their first experiences in Canada, I am reminded of my own beg/inn/ings in Ottawa / Canada. I can feel the excitement, hope, joy as well as sorrow and frustrations in their stories, but mostly I see their strength and their resilience. We were all in our early to mid-twenties when we arrived here – some of us came to join our husbands, and some came along with their husbands and their “dreams” (*Maya & Aparna*) of coming to North America because they believed this was “a land of opportunity” (*Kanak & Devi*). So even though at first it was a “culture shock” (*Gomati*) and “you didn’t know where to go” (*Aarya*), or “what you were supposed to do” (*Padma*) or “where do I fit in this country” (*Gomati*), we were excited and (cautiously) hopeful to start a new life in “a different world” (*Kanak*).

Amongst my 11 participants, I had previously met 9 (nine) of them either at the library, or through various community events, and even though over the years we had lost touch, some of them knew my (her)story and perhaps that is the reason they did not ask me quest/ions about my own live(d) experiences. I had never met Roopa or Maya before, so when I went to Maya’s place, she looked through the questions and said “*First, I want you to tell me your story. Were you born here? Because if you were born here, then I don’t know how you will take what I am saying.*” Thus even though I was the Storycatcher-researcher, I was also being re/searched or storied by my participant(s).

Veena (1991)

I came to Canada in 1991. I got engaged in 1989, and got married in 1990. I waited for a whole year to get my immigration papers. Our families knew each other, and even though they had moved to Canada in the early 1960s, they had stayed in touch. Our mothers and his aunt, who was our family doctor, thought

that we would make a 'ideal' couple because we had many common interests, and we were married on one of his trips to India. But when I came to Canada, it seemed like I had travelled back in time to the 1920s-1930s of India. Having been raised in Bombay by 'liberal' parents who believed in equality for boys and girls, and having worked as a College Teacher, I was shocked to find that I had no say in anything. My in-laws ruled the household. My mother-in-law decided what I should wear, who I could talk to and what I should eat! I was 26! Apart from them, I did not know anybody else here yet, they watched all my movements and even my interactions with other people and they even monitored my phone conversations with my parents and my brothers. They had different rules for me and different rules for their own children. As for my Canadian-raised Indian husband, he was an autocratic husband who wanted his wife to obey him unquestioningly, and if I didn't, there were both physical and emotional consequences for me. He even threatened to deport me! It was a nightmare. Even though I had to give up everything when I came here, he didn't want to give up his bachelorhood, and he continued to live as he did before I came here with full support from his parents. There was also a recession in Canada at that time and it was hard to find a job as a teacher and that added to my woes.

My father passed away in July 1991, due to complications from diabetes and my mother-in-law decided that I should not go back to India for my father's funeral. When I told Amma about the atrocities at home, she could not and would not believe me. She could not understand how so-called friends, who bragged about their devotion to God and their charitable work, could treat her daughter in this fashion. She also thought that perhaps they –my parents, had pampered me too much and I did not know how to live with other people. So she started telling me how 'a woman's place is by her husband's side' and how she had raised me to be a good daughter / wife, and that I should learn to accept things the way they are. She also told me that if I went back to India as a divorced woman, it would very awkward and it would also be hard to find wives for my brothers! At first, I felt betrayed! I did not recognize this woman – my own mother. My Amma used to

believe in me and she was strong and courageous. This Amma seemed so different! Almost as if she had lost her strength and courage after Pappa's death. Thus not being able to tolerate the abuse any more, I sought the help of some friends and my colleagues at the library who helped me find a good lawyer, and I finally left him.

Leaving my marriage and my husband was like incurring the wrath of a whole Indo-Canadian community. In one day, I went from being the nice, dutiful, obedient daughter-in-law to someone who was shunned and ostracized. Yet, all my movements were closely monitored and I was stalked by him / in-laws (and even by their friends) until I went to the police and lodged a complaint and got a restraining order. When I went to court to testify against my husband the community started saying that "Good Indian girls do not do such things!" I was accused of using my marriage as an excuse to emigrate to Canada and my in-laws insisted that I should return to India like other Indian girls with unsuccessful / failed marriages had done.

If I talk about disorder and danger in an orderly, safe voice, I protect both myself and my reader from actually dealing with it
(Sophie Tamas, 2009 in *Writing and Righting trauma: Troubling the Autoethnographic voice*)

I decided to stay in Canada to prove to them that they could not bring some-one from India and treat them in this fashion; and also because I felt that I had no support from Amma who had previously always encouraged me to be independent and not take any abuse from anyone. My younger brother came to visit me here and when he went and told Amma she finally realized what was happening and said she would support me. Yet, somehow things were never the same

between us.

All her life, Amma blamed herself for 'ruining' my life by 'arranging' this match. {Note: Our marriage was not a forced one. I could have declined to marry him}. This was a big learning experience and a turning point in my life. It also made me view things very differently because I went from being a 'protected' daughter to a

homeless orphan in a strange new world and my search for ho[me] really started then. Going back to school has been a long-lost dream. Thus you can say that, this is a search for a ho[me] in more ways than one.

Kindness of Strangers

Going through a divorce and surviving it made me realize the “Kindness” of *strangers*. In this poem Naomi Shihab Nye (1952)⁴⁵ writes:

Before you know what kindness really is
 you must lose things,
 feel the future dissolve in a moment
 like salt in a weakened broth.
 What you held in your hand,
 what you counted and carefully saved,
 all this must go so you know
 how desolate the landscape can be
 between the regions of kindness

My colleagues at the library supported me. Some of them were also i-m-migrants like me and could empathize with my newcomer struggles. They came to court with me and helped me get through the worst times in my life. My neighbours, who barely knew me, let me stay in their basement for a while, and another neighbour, who herself was going through a separation from her husband, invited me to have supper with her and her children, in exchange for tutoring her daughter. My lawyer fought for me as if I was her own daughter or sister, and the social workers at the community centre helped me by answering all my questions. For a while, the counsellor at the police station seemed like the only best friend I ever had. Thus, I met people who helped me

⁴⁵ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/kindness>

to believe in myself again and in some ways this is when I really matured. I also knew for a fact that I could never really go back *home* to Bombay. For a very long time, Amma, who had never left India, or Bombay for that matter, could never comprehend how absolute strangers had gone out of their way to do so much for me, and how I had now started to trust *complete strangers* – my colleagues / friends! Yet, it was these same *strangers* who had saved my life and had believed in me.

As someone who used to rebel against the very traditional religious beliefs, I came to realize what my parents had meant when they said that God / Divine power makes its presence felt in different ways / forms. I started listening to old Marathi and Hindi songs and remembering mythological stories with a new awareness / understanding. My favourite childhood mythological story of the young boy-prince **Dhruva** (ध्रुव)⁴⁶, the *North Star*, who had performed rigorous penance in order to find a place to call his own (home) in this world, suddenly seemed very relevant to me, and I started to pray for Dhruva's strength and courage to guide me towards hope and home. In the mythological story, Lord Vishnu, the Creator of the Universe, appears before Dhruva and blesses him. In due course of time when Dhruva dies, he becomes the North (Pole) Star or *Dhruva Tara* in the sky, a steady guiding light for travellers / sojourners to find their way home.

These experience(s) made me realize the truth in this Marathi song written by the poet Madhukar Joshi:

जगी ज्यास कोणी नाही | त्यास देव आहे ⁴⁷

[Jagi jyasa koni nahi | tyasa Deva ahey]

⁴⁶ The mythological story of Dhruva (the North Star) is about a determined young boy-prince, who, after being denied his right to sit by his father's side, goes in search of justice and to find a place to call his own / a home.

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYtXQThKFtk>

For the one who is an orphan in this world there is always God (Higher Power / the Universe)

Métissage Two: I-M-migrant(s)

All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances

Shakespeare in “As you Like it” (2.7.139)

When we reveal details that we think are excruciatingly personal,

we discover that the personal is universal

Baldwin, 2005, p.85

Q.2: Kelley (2013) states, that “feeling like a ‘foreigner’ does not end, instead, as years go by it lingers, creating mixed emotions about belonging, home, and identity” (p.2). What do you think about this statement? What are your experiences of immigrating to Canada?

For my second question, which is a follow-up of my first question, I engaged in more “intensive autobiographical narrative inquiries” (Clandinin, 2013) because I wanted to know more details about these women’s experiences of immigrating to Canada. Somehow, the first question became like the overarching question for all of my participants because their answers seemed to cover aspects of the other questions as well. One of them had initially said to me, “*Why are you asking so many questions? Why don’t you just let it be? You sound exactly like my daughter.*” But once we started talking, she started sharing her stories without any hesitation. My conversations with my participants lasted from 45 minutes to over 2.5 hours in some cases. Some

of them began the conversation with an invocation to Lord Ganesha (*Om Sri Ganeshaya Namaha!*), or with a *Gayatri mantra*⁴⁸ (prayer to the Sun God to illuminate the path / life ahead)

*Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah
Tat Sa-vitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat*

Roopa

*'Feeling like a foreigner' is true
because the general population doesn't let you forget.
They even treat French Canadians as foreigners
so what does that say?
It was hard when I started working
because people were not kind.
You really had to claw your way up
because nobody wants to give you a break.
My children are shocked at some of the things you had to deal with
because they have never encountered them.
After I became a trainer and a manager,
they didn't see me as a foreigner.
What they saw as a foreign part of me was my rules for my children
and why talking about my family wasn't allowed...
I would negotiate the boundaries with my children
but once they were negotiated,
I would not change them.
6 – 7 years into my working life,
I wore a saree to a Christmas party.
Next morning my supervisor calls me in telling me I couldn't wear that EVER!
'You are in Canada now. You have to be Canadian.*

⁴⁸This mantra is often recited in yoga classes sometimes during Sun Salutations, or at the end of the class

You have to change the way you live, you dress, you eat, you think!
And to think that I grew up
wearing a skirt and a blouse as a uniform!
This was a social function
and people were wearing long dresses.
So what was the difference?
'No' she says, 'Just because I say so!'
You know, I taught myself to wear a saree.
I used diaper pins to hold the pleats together,
I wore it in the snow,
I wore it every day to work from then on!
She said 'You do realize that you will not ever get a promotion.'
I said 'I dare you!'
I did lose maybe 3-4 promotions in my career
But I wasn't going to let anybody rule my life.
A lot of Indian women may not have been strong enough to do that.
More than the Canadians,
the Indians told me how stupid I was.
That was one of those watershed moments
in my own personal development
that I can do this!
My own mother thought I was mad.
I would have been like this if I had stayed in India.
I would have been a foreigner in India too as an adult, as an older adult.

<i>"I too call myself I"</i> (Kamala Das, as quoted by Visweswaran, 1994, p.114).

Maya

Feeling like a foreigner is a very unique place to be.

You are in, but you are out!

For me, as a writer, it was a gift.

*Specially, I am out of India and I can look back
 and write about it.
 I am out of Canada, and I can look in and write about it.
 So, at first you accept that you are a foreigner,
 because you ARE a foreigner.
 Then you resent
 that you are always going to be a foreigner.
 Then as you mature,
 you come to a place where you say:
 'Hey, I can use this to my advantage!'
 And then it becomes you
 your place, your identity
 you don't want any other.
 Now when I go to India, I am a foreigner there.
 When I am here, I am who I am.
 Canada is made of every colour and every race.
 A few generations back they were all foreigners.
 You go to Europe and you realize
 how lucky we are in Canada
 we live within the mosaic in a very free interchanging manner.
 Whereas the old world
 keeps these walls around each culture alive.
 Even in India [people ask]
 'Are you a Madrasi?
 Are you a Marathi? Are you a Punjabi?'⁴⁹
 You know, all these things and castes and all that.
 It is funny...you go back to India,*

⁴⁹ As Fludernik (2003) has mentioned "in India, the Indian caste system separates people" (p. xx). Here Maya is highlighting the fact that people are very conscious of the regional differences, and castes, sub-castes, etc., and sometimes in parties, or other social gatherings this becomes a point of contention. A Madrasi is someone from Chennai (Madras), a Punjabi is someone from the Punjab, and a Marathi is someone from Maharashtra (Mumbai).

and they know immediately that you are from the West.

Our manners have changed.

There is something about being Canadian.

I am proud of being Canadian. It feels good!

It is a good country to be proud of.

Not that there aren't flaws, every country has flaws.

The shock was that I had more rights than the natives

/ aboriginals.

That is very sad...

this aspect of apartheid in our country is very sad.

My experience of being Canadian is:

It has humanized me.

It has got me in touch with my own prejudices,

and it has taught me compassion.

Canadians are very compassionate people.

I have learnt a lot.

I go back and meet people my age,

my friends, my family members

I have to give them a lot of benefit of doubt

because they haven't had the advantage of learning from Canada.

The best thing about immigration is

it's a fantastic adventure.

It is not Canada you discover,

but you discover things about yourself.

Take the risk to study
abroad, take the time to
find yourself. You will.
Honestly.
(Sharma, 2009, p. 135)

Kanak

At times you do feel strange

because to reconcile certain values is very hard

especially being a Brahmin girl

*This is the hardest thing I find
 My children would say to me:
 'Mom you are so hard on us.
 You want us to do well
 but you are taking the joy out of growing up.
 We get 98% and you ask 'where is the other 2%?'
 You know, I come from a certain background
 and I carry that weight,
 and that name that was pushed upon us
 and I think I am trying to do the same with my
 children.
 I want them to excel in life
 and this is the only method I know.
 Yes, we are different.
 No matter how many times you say that we are all the same,
 we are not!
 You don't change 'inside.'
 Why should I be the same as you?
 I don't want to be like you.
 I should be different whatever my caliber is.
 My children understood.
 It is the same at work.
 I have never felt discriminated or awkward about it.
 If others feel strange it is their problem.*

If children did not excel at
 school there was a 'problem'
 and parents 'were not doing
 their job.'

(Amy Chua, 2011, in the
*Battle Hymn of the Tiger
 Mother*, p. 5)

Devi

*Feeling like a foreigner?
 Fortunately for me, I never felt like
 'OMG, I am thousands of miles away.'*

*Even in India, I grew up in a different city
 outside my mother (native) province,
 outside our core culture.
 I was part of a diaspora there too.
 Of course at home we spoke our mother tongue.
 So, to me, coming here was like going into a different city
 be it in India or be it abroad.*

The profound respect for others
 starts with respect for oneself, as
 every individual carries the
 society within her
 (Trinh Minh-ha, 2011, p.33)

*So I didn't have the feeling of being a foreigner at
 all.*

*I suppose we had a very good circle of friends
 and if people were inquisitive about me,
 like the way I look
 or the way I dress, I didn't care.*

*I wore pants and shirts for winter
 but all other times I was in my sarees.
 If people looked at me, I didn't feel strange.*

*It is natural for them to look at someone
 who is dressed differently right?
 I would smile and say 'oh, you like this saree?'
 and I would just turn it into a conversation
 and break the ice.*

My outlook was it was ok for people to ask us questions.

They would ask about my bindi.

Some others (Indians) who came later were so surprised that

I continue putting bindi and all that.

*They would feel intimidated if people asked them
 but I said, 'Yes, they ask. So what?'*

Also I felt that people won't know if we speak in English or not, right?

So I used to start off to let them know

'You can talk to me. We can have a conversation.'

So with all those things I never felt as a foreigner.
I feel saddened
 (Reading the question again)
"Instead as years go by it lingers creating mixed emotions about belonging."
'Oh my Lord!'
What's this belonging?
Home is where you are
and identity is what you carry wherever you are.
And belonging is –
you belong to the place [where] you are.
Specially in Canada!
Come on! They say Canada is a mosaic of cultures
you see so many different cultures
so how can we feel foreign in a culturally packed place?
Again I feel like it is all in the outlook.
What you are expecting from this move?
What are you expecting from people?
Those are the things that pull them back.
To feel integrated,
one does not have to change totally.
You can keep your Indian values
and I don't like to say Indian values
because values are values, universal values.

Padma

"Feeling like a foreigner" ...that was in the beginning.
Since I had gone to a convent school back home,
language was not the problem
so I could enjoy TV.

*But at the same time, when you get out of the 4 corners of your walls
that you call home,
you don't feel like you belong.*

Not for a long long time.

*It takes a long time to make yourself belong to a
place.*

*Just to venture opening the door of that apartment
and venturing out needed a lot of courage.*

Back home I was free as a bird,

I can do anything, I can go anywhere

I belonged!

*It felt like you have de-rooted a small plant and
you are trying to make it grow.*

And it is hard to grow.

But you have to put your roots down here.

If you don't,

you won't be able to give your children the same kind of strength.

So I started volunteering in my daughter's pre-school,

so that I learn how they teach here

so that I can teach her at home the same way.

Also I made sure that she learns swimming,

she learns skating, and she goes for skiing.

She should feel proud of herself and who she is.

Even if we are here, when people look at us

they know we are not here-here

like we have come from somewhere to be here,

and that makes a big difference.

Unless and until you are proud of yourself

who you are,

you cannot go far enough.

This "I" was embodied in the landscape, the place names, rivers, lakes, stretches of beach that were tied to the narrative of, not just my life, but that of my parents and grandparents before me
(Selvadurai, 2004, p.2-3)

*So I volunteered at all my children's schools
 putting hennas and mehndis.
 I was there for all their pumpkin rides,
 at school hot lunches, at school committees,
 I have been volunteering at schools on Diwali⁵⁰ days
 to let the children know what Diwali is all about.
 I felt that since people don't know why we do what we do,
 that is the reason they look at us differently.
 When I was doing one of these story tellings
 one kid stood up and said
 'Oh, Hindu goddesses they have 5 or 10 hands, how can you explain that?'*



Goddess Lakshmi (Google images)



*Image from a Mother's Day postcard by my
cousin Rekha Shirur*

*So, that was a challenge for me right then and there.
 So I said 'What does your mom do?'
 She said, 'she cooks.'
 'She goes to work, she takes us to soccer, she does this and that.'
 So if I tell you to draw your mom with what all she does,*

⁵⁰ Diwali is the Hindu Festival of Lights.

how would you draw her?

'I would draw one hand doing this, one hand doing that'

I said 'Exactly!'

The goddess can do so many things as a mom,

so that is the reason they are printed like that.

Not necessarily physically they are like that.

So even you, as a child, you go swimming, you play soccer,

so when you want to show that in a drawing,

that is exactly how you would do.

They were very happy and they asked me to tell them more

why we put bindis (sindur), etc.

I started with a story

and ended up giving a question and answer session.

I thought if this is where I am going to live,

if this is a place where I am going to call home,

I have to adapt to all its good(s) and bad(s).

That is exactly why I was involved in Spelling Bee

and that is the reason why I pulled you guys from everywhere

to help me and it was a big success.

What we gave to the community I am not sure,

but what I got from the children,

that I will cherish all my life.

So that's how I started building a connection with the community.

My children are all born and brought up here

and what they are getting from here is priceless.

So that is how I made the bridge.

This is home for my children so "Go Canada!"

Gomati

*In the beginning
 as soon as I came,
 I felt that (as if I was a foreigner)
 Am I supposed to live in this country
 where people don't mingle the way we mingle in India?
 All kinds of questions did come
 But the more I got involved in the community,
 started volunteering,
 and working,
 I saw that people are just like we are in India.
 They also have feelings
 they also have duties which they have to fulfill.
 After a couple of weeks
 when I started going out and mingling,
 that feeling of 'foreigner' vanished.
 But there is one thing I have always wondered,
 here the community is self-centred,
 but in India there is this whole society
 which appears to stand by each other
 whether it is individuals, or families, or society,
 At least it appears so.
 But the lesson you get later on in life is that is not so.
 As long as you have your parents,
 as long as you have that first support, that's it.
 After that you are on your own.
 Later on there comes a stage when you say
 'I am not dependent on anybody.
 I can offer things and
 if I get anything from others it is fine*

Everything is fine just the way it is.'
It is beautiful just the way it is.
It has occurred to me
that people will behave as they are meant to.
Everybody behaves according to their nature
and we cannot change anyone.
Remember the story of the Saint and the scorpion?
Where the sage said that it is his nature [Dharma] to save
and it is the scorpion's nature [Dharma] to sting?
You realize that and you lead a peaceful life.

Aarya

[Reading the interview question]

She, (the author, Kelley) is right in a way because
when you are in India your family is all around you,
and your friends are all around you.

Your customs are all there.

Everybody is almost the same
and you walk out on the street
and you hear the same languages all over the place.

What happens is, you come here,
you assimilate,

you learn the customs,
you learn the way of life here,
but you still know it is not your custom,
you are adapting.

I think, we, the first generation immigrants
become frozen in time.

We go back to India and we are lost there,

What is home?...Is home a geographical space, a historical space, and emotional sensory space? Home is always so crucial to immigrants and migrants.

(Mohanty, 2003, p.126)

*because India has changed.
 It has gone on to be[come] something else.
 I remember India from the time I moved here
 and because I remember that, I like it more
 but that is not there anymore.
 I feel like a foreigner there.
 But I come here, I still feel, because I look different,
 I will act different
 and I am still a little bit of a foreigner here.
 So basically, when I go back,
 the first couple of weeks I am just in glory.
 I am meeting my family, my friends, and everything.
 After the first 2 weeks I start thinking,
 'I think I need to go home'
 and at that point 'home' becomes Canada.
 But when I am here, I am looking forward to going 'home' – 'India'!
 So, I have two homes but I don't have any.
 I completely agree with Kelley [the author]
 So years go by and the emotions are still there
 and you feel those all over again every time.*

Aparna

*In Canada, you have all kind of support or opportunity
 I am sure, there is in India too.
 But in India too many peoples,
 too many competitions, as compared to Canada.
 If you put your 100% effort,
 if you study hard, work hard,
 you can get it.
 There is no doubt about it.*

*But I feel I am more safe and more successful.
 I have succeeded in Canada
 I work as a peer supporter for abused women.
 I was well established in India too.
 Everything is different here.
 Weather wise of course it is totally different
 That is the beauty of Canada you know.
 Of course dress is different
 Our way of dressing up is very different
 In India we don't hug anybody,
 which is very common in Canada
 any friend, any co-worker, any employer
 they see you after a long time
 they like to hug which we don't do at all in India.
 See, I didn't hug you after you came in
 even though I saw you after maybe 15 years.
 That's our culture I guess.
 In the beginning, wherever I used to go
 to see a doctor,
 or to rent an apartment
 you have to shake hands which we never do in India.
 We fold both hands and do Namastey.
 Everything is different.
 You have to cope.*

Gowri

*I agree with the statement seeing that
 "In spite of the number of years you stay here, you have mixed emotions."
 You have left a country at a young age*

*Sometimes when we see that people in India are prospering,
 we think maybe we left it for the wrong reason.
 Feeling like a 'foreigner' because of our own feeling
 It doesn't depend on the society or anybody else
 it is within us
 because we have come at a later age as adults
 and we always feel that we are foreigners.
 Our children don't feel that.
 They feel that their home is here.
 For us, we always think that there is a home somewhere else.
 This is our home now,
 but we had belonged somewhere else.
 That might be why we feel like foreigners.
 Then of course we still have family there
 we have our roots there.
 My parents are still there, my sisters, siblings,
 everybody is there.
 That is why we feel that home is still there.*

Shreesha

*I would say that Canadians themselves
 don't want you to lose your identity.
 They don't want you to be someone else that you are not.
 Over the years, our way of speaking /talking,
 looking, expressing
 everything has changed.
 So they are much more acceptable to that
 and they do realize that
 you are coming from somewhere else.*

*It is not always easy, nor has it been easy
 it takes time to get adjusted to a place.
 I would say at least 80% of us
 who come from Southern India do speak English,
 so for us, to adjust in Canada is not that hard.
 Even though you speak English there,
 when you come here
 you have to learn the ways of expressing
 which is different here.
 It is faster for us
 because we were already taught English
 in our schools back there.
 I have not felt like a foreigner.
 Maybe some times when bringing up the children
 I might have felt like that.
 But when I am on my own
 I have not felt like that.*

Maanasi

*I think in Canada, the term “foreigner” is different
 because most of the people are immigrants.
 People are welcoming here.
 When I came here looking for a job,
 or calling universities to find out what I can learn,
 they were always welcoming, always helpful.
 It was a contrast to what I was used to in India.
 In India, if you want to do or get something done,
 it is a lot of hassle.
 You have to go through a lot of people.*

*So I didn't feel like I am a foreigner here when I first came
because everybody was very helpful
But now that I am working,
I feel as if I have 2 identities -
one from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. where I am Canadian
and after 3 p.m. I am Indian.
When I go to work I try to blend in the culture.
When I come home
I will watch Indian channels like Zee-TV,
cook Indian food,
I will talk my language,
and forget everything about my office.
I think that I won't be able to blend in completely
as a Canadian in this country
because of my background
because I have spent 20-plus years in my home country
and that is how it is going to be for the rest of my life.
Two different identities!
It doesn't trouble me.
I think every Indo-Canadian woman does that.
It also depends on your personality,
how open you are,
how talkative you are, how you make friends.
Like in my office, I am in the cubicle all day and
interaction with other co-workers is generally related to work.
We rarely talk about family
and I think that is why I have these two identities.
Some [Indo-Canadian women] have blended in completely.
But I think there will be many women like me
who have these two separate lives.*

*One of the reasons why we have these two identities
 is there are many resources now
 like Youtube, Indian channels, Internet
 You can call India any time!
 Maybe 50 years back
 I heard that it was very hard to call India
 so maybe women who were there in that period,
 they tried to blend into the society.
 I think there is no need for me to do that
 that is why in the office I am a Canadian,
 and at home I am still living (like an) Indian.*

Living in-between

Dia/spora, two/spora, two/origins?

Tang, 2003, p. 30

*The 'homelessness' of one's identity, when one belongs to neither one group
 nor to the other, when one is a 'mixed-up hybrid kid'*

Aoki, 1999, p.28

Maanasi's comment about leading two lives / identities takes me to my next theme of living in-between. According to Gnanamony (2008) "wherever they go, these [diasporan Indian] migrants carry with them a profound sense of attachment to their former place of residence [and] their souls are always found to be divided; in other words, they are neither there nor here fully" (p. 61). Parameswaran (2003) confirms this as she states that as a member of the Indian diaspora, she, like some others, has "felt a sense of both exile *and* of home within Canada" (p.xlv). She further states that people who move away from their native countries "occupy [and transmit to

future generations] a liminality, an uneasy pull between two cultures” [and] calls it “Trishanku’s curse” (p. xlx) after the mortal King⁵¹ from Indian mythology, who was suspended in-between heaven and earth (middle-ground) when he could not achieve his ambition to reach Heaven in his mortal body.

I have talked to some of my friends about the ‘Trishanku’⁵² dilemma I/we all face. We seem to experience this ‘curse’ more acutely after a ‘nostalgic’ trip back ‘home’.

When I go to India, I realize that home is not what it used to be and somehow I have become a stranger in my own imagined home. I am not sure, how much of this feeling has anything to do with the fact that I have to apply for a Visitor’s visa to go there in the first place! Perhaps, it is also because I feel the absence / presence of my parents more intensely when I am there. Thus, within a week or so, I get homesick for Canada and want to come back. But in Canada too, I am the ‘other.’ This is why I feel like Trishanku existing in the hyphens somewhere between India and Canada – between wor(l)ds. My friends also tell me that because of their/our dilemmas, they fear their children might have be/come hyphe-nated, or in Aokian terms “mixed-up hybrid kid[s]” (Aoki, 1999, p. 28).

In my quest to understand this notion of diasporic or ‘Trishanku’ experience, I turned to writers who have experienced this phenomenon. Trinh (2011) says, “[t]oday when I am asked where home is for me, I am struck by how far away it is, and yet, home is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine. The source has been travelling and dwelling on hybrid ground” (p. 12). Behar (1996), tells us that she was drawn to anthropology because she was

⁵¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trishanku>

⁵² As youngsters, when we could not make up our minds about some things, my Aajji would say that one cannot live like Trishanku or live in limbo. Thus apart from its reference to the mythological King, Trishanku also depicts a person’s ‘indecisive’ state of mind.

raised within three cultures—Jewish, Cuban and American. She writes “I am here because I am a woman of the border: between places, between identities, between languages, between cultures, between longings and illusions” (p. 162). For Tang (2003), a Chinese-English translator, diaspora implies “movement and change...the ambiguity of who one is and is becoming in the midst of displacement and re-location” (p. 30). Aoki (2000), talks about “Yû-mu as both ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ [that] marks the space of ambivalence in the midst of which humans dwell...the ambiguity in yû-mu is understood as a site [space] pregnant with possibilities [hope]” (p. 323). Hasebe-Ludt (2009), thinks that through her own experiences of exile and migration, and as a European living in Canada, she has realized that the “tensioned space of cultural and geographic displacement...can be/come a generative place” (p.148), “urging us to consider” how we might each live, with ourselves, and with others, and learn to be “at home in the world in the 21st century” (p. 218- 219).

Asher (2002) uses the term “hybrid consciousness” (p.84) when she writes about the awareness that emerges out of the struggle to situate oneself in relation to multiple borders, hybrid identities, cultures and representations. “It is the process of rethinking ‘Self’ via encounters with the ‘Other’” (p. 85) she says, that develops our hybrid consciousness of the social forces that shape us, and helps us to engage with difference in productive, meaningful ways. Anzaldúa (1987) calls it a “mestiza consciousness, or a consciousness of the borderlands” that emerges out of racial, ideological, cultural and biological “cross-pollinization” (p. 78). This mestiza consciousness which can be a source of intense pain makes us “conscious of our own borderlands” and allows us to recognize that the “clashes and contradictions we encounter are located within *and* outside of the Self” (p.78). Selvadurai (2004) says that it was his arrival in Canada that “shook his sense of I-identity” (p. 3) which he had never questioned before. For Hall

(1990), the diaspora experience is defined “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 235).

Radhakrishnan (1996), explains “diasporic subjectivity is thus necessarily double: acknowledging an earlier elsewhere in an active and critical relationship with the cultural politics of one’s present home ... ‘Home’ then becomes a mode of interpretive in-betweenness, as a form of accountability to more than one location” (p. xiii-xiv). This is because for some, “a full commitment to a specific home is not possible...a dual belonging is preferable to the alternative of losing either home, and this is becoming increasingly common in today’s globalized world” (Kelley, 2013, p. 118). Listen to what my participants have to say about their **Trishanku experiences** as they navigate and per/form their hyphenated currere with/in these hybrid liminal spaces which are both home and not-home.

Métissage Three: Trishanku Dilemma

*Because I, a mestiza, / continually walk out of one culture, / and into another, /
because I am in all cultures at the same time*

Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 77

Q.3: I feel like I live in-between or that my life is like “Trishanku”. What does it mean for you to be an Indo-Canadian?

Roopa

I never think of it.

I am who I am

I take the best of both sides

and it has become a habit .
 Canada is home and India is a foreign country for me.
 I can't take it in India any more
 just like I can't take Toronto or New York.
 This is home - 100%!
 I was 20 when I came here
 even my brothers have grown up as adults without me
 and I have grown to who I am without them.
 My husband does a lot of trips to India
 I just don't have it in me to go to India after my parents passed away.
 On my last visit there,
 it upset my mother when I called Canada **Home**.
 I have no desire to go to India.
 I used to take my children every year
 they needed to know their grandparents.
 I resented it then, I resent it now.
 Now I want to see other parts of the world
 I want to see everything I have read about.
 I think language has a lot to do with it
 I grew up in a convent
 so my mother tongue is English.
 You cry in your mother tongue
 and laugh in your mother tongue
 and for me it was always English.
 I learned my **[real]** mother tongue only after I got married.
 So you see language was a big thing that helped me here.
 I never felt less than anybody
 because I was raised that you are not less than the boys at home.
 I was comfortable enough in my skin
 I think my children are most comfortable in theirs.

*They think Canadian, they don't think Indian
 whereas a lot of the Indian children are half-and-half
 because at home there is a different set of values,
 and outside the house there is a different set
 I find that is hard on the family also.*

Maya

*Maybe it's my age,
 because I am very comfortable in my skin
 comfortable with who I am.
 But yes, when you come to Canada,
 the first decade you go through
 a sort of an identity crisis
 and you need to sort it out.
 I remember, a few years after being in Canada,
 it was such a shock when it dawned on me
 that I will die in Canada,
 that I will die amongst strangers.
 Then my daughter died of a brain hemorrhage
 She was only 14
 and Canada came into the house
 with such kindness
 and compassion and caring
 that I suddenly realized
 I am the one keeping Canadians at bay
 I am the one who is aware that they are white
 and I am not.
 That experience rooted me in Canada
 Her death rooted me in Canada!
 We don't know we are doing it.*

In desperate hope I go and
 search for her in all the
 corners of my room;
 I find her not.
 (From Rabindranath
 Tagore's (1913) Gitanjali,
 #87, as cited in *On Death
 and dying* by E. Kubler-
 Ross, 1969, p. 147)

*We are not aware
 maybe in an attempt to protect ourselves,
 maybe in an attempt to hang on to our identity,
 I don't know why we do it, but we do it.
 Now, everybody is a human being –my species
 regardless of age and colour.
 Had I lived in India,
 I would never have had this insight.
 Now, you have lived in India,
 and you are living in Canada,
 and you can understand what I am saying.
 There are certain things...
 things I cannot share with my sister-in-law
 because she has not lived in the West.
 That is why I asked you 'were you born here?'
 Because if you were born here,
 then I don't know how you would take
 what I am saying.
 But having lived in India and here,
 you are more in tune.
 Canada makes you question your belief system.
 All your beliefs are theoretical until
 life puts them to the test.
 The experience of immigration
 does put your beliefs to the test
 and it is a growth
 and it is all grist for the mill
 and you grow.
 So where I am now it is fine as it is.
 If it is Trishanku then it is fine.*

I am convinced that this
 question – how one understands
 and defines home – is a
 profoundly political one. Since
 settled notions of territory,
 community, geography and
 history don't work for us, what
 does it really mean to be “South
 Asian” in the United States
 /[Canada]?
 (Mohanty, 2003, in *Feminism
 without Borders*, p.126-127)

I accept.
That is the Buddhist belief -
This is how it is.
It is not a conflict.
It is another window a 3-faced window right?
So, like Shakespeare said
'we are all on a stage' aren't we?
We are playing a role and now we are in Canada --
Our role is Indo-Canadian.
We eat food from all over the world in Ottawa
We dress as we like, we can wear a bolero,
or we can wear a shawl.
We can do what we like.
So why not take on what we want to take on?
I like the freedom
It is a very freeing experience –Immigration.
I never believed in an Indian ghetto
where I only met Indians
and I don't believe in not meeting Indians.
Like here I am,
wanting to help you out with your research.
I have been to school as a mature student
and I know what it is like.
I don't have any complaints to tell you about.
I have no regrets either about coming to Canada,
or about having gone to school here
or having written
and then not continuing.

Kanak

*Yes, there is sadness, there is struggle inside
sometimes you feel there is blend.*

It is a mixture and I am aware

I can choose now.

I am trying to take the best here

and trying to bring the best from there

at least that is what we are trying to do

and sometimes it is hard to mesh the two.

My son-in-law is not Indian

and I had to overcome that concept of

“we should find an Indian to marry her.”

It is not going to happen.

So am I changing outwardly?

or inside I have accepted?

That is the big question.

So acceptance, allowing that change,

and pleasing the other world back home is very hard.

But things in India have changed too.

I am very grateful that I am here.

But yes, you do live back and forth

It is a bi-polar kind of thing.

When good things happen you wish you were there

Life is tough here

but here you are making choices being very aware.

Even people there have changed.

As immigrants here,

we have tried to maintain the good values that we got there

and we are more Indian than the Indians in India now.

I am grateful that the system allows us to be free to some degree

*but we have to make an effort too
to understand what is good here.
If you take a rigid position then I think the children will fail
and you have failed your children.
They have to live here.
This is their reality
They have to make a living here
They have to be good citizens here.
For that I have to move with them
I have to allow that transition to happen in a smooth way
rather than resisting it.
They consider themselves Canadian
They say:
'Mom there is good and bad everywhere.
If something is wrong here
You have to fight in a nice way to convince people.'
That is what I learned from my children
because that is the link I have with the bigger world.
There are fundamental values which exist everywhere
So try and grab on to that
It is not Indian or Canadian
it is just the right thing to do
It is your "Dharma" [Duty].
I think we are very lucky to be out of that big bubble
India is also a dreamland.
[There] they live in a very protected environment –
especially women.
30 years back when I was growing up
you knew nothing of the world
and you are not even a person.*

*So when you come here and you allow that freedom
 and it is handled well
 with friends' support, husband and family,
 you grow up, you blossom and say:
 How lucky I am to be here!
 I can do anything I want to a certain degree
 You choose and that is what you allow your children to do too.*

Devi

*A big Thanks to the already existing Canadian community
 who really accepted me
 and us (my family)
 the way we are.
 We didn't have to change anything.
 My children make me realize
 that I have not picked up the local pronunciation.
 I didn't feel like in-between,
 here nor there at all
 like 'oh why aren't people not understanding me?'
 I didn't feel that at all.
 It is more the social expectations from our parents' back home
 Saying 'oh my God, what are you doing?'
 and me not realizing that it is something wrong that I did.
 The expectations are so different from here to there.
 I don't feel that I have changed or something like that.
 Change is part of growing up
 and part of you growing old and maturing,
 so if I am doing something that I haven't done in the past,
 I don't think I have changed.*

It is part of where I am and what I need to do.

Of course my mom sometimes would say,

'you have changed.'

I never felt that I am neither here nor there,

because I accepted the differences.

Let me give you an example:

I never worked in India

so my first job here was a secretary,

a front-desk secretary.

I just had one good pair of pants and a shirt at the time

because I was home for 8 years

and I was all happy being in saris

so I used to wear saris and go to work.

Nobody said anything.

I was right at the front desk, receiving people.

So what does it say?

Greatness about me,

or greatness about people?

They are so very accepting.

That is why I keep saying it is all in our outlook.

If you are doubtful

if you are not confident,

then you start thinking of these other possibilities.

But if you are confident,

those possibilities may be there

but it won't debilitate us.

Padma

Of course we all live like Trishanku.

All the Indo-Canadians

because you have spent your prime time there

and when you came here,

at that time you were not accepted

like you were not embraced

so you missed that what you got from home.

And now when we start accepting here,

we lose back there.

Doesn't matter how hard you try to break the tie,

the ties cannot be broken

because your soul has been connected

to your parents, your siblings,

your friends, your school, everywhere.

It is not easy.

It is not easy at all.

When you hear your parents are not doing well,

or you hear someone is getting married,

you just want to drop everything and go

but you just cannot!

When I first came, calling home was so expensive.

You had to place a call and then wait and wait.

Now-a-days because the phone is so much better,

I can call home every day.

I can keep in touch with my friends on Gmail, Facebook, WhatsApp

and I am kind of at peace

that I am getting the best of both worlds.

The time when you really wanted their support, it wasn't there.

It was a trial really

*but I think it brought out your strength
and you know who you are because of that experience.*

Gomati

*I don't think of myself as Indo-Canadian.
Like it is said in the Bhagwat Gita,
I consider myself as part of this whole universe.
In my whole family everyone is included
There is no section as such that these are
Swiss, German, French, Canadian, etc.
There was one time in my daughter's life
where I felt that this child has to keep her identity.
We need to learn goodness from others
and yet keep our intrinsic nature
–our **Swa-dharma**.
If we let go of our Swa-dharma we will be miserable
and go through an identity crisis.
In order that she does not go through that
we have encouraged her to follow our Sanskaras
(संस्कार)⁵³(ways of living),
and even in school from the age of 4 she was participating
in all the cultural activities with her teachers.
I would also go and volunteer
and there she was enjoying the Canadian culture
like Christmas, Halloween, Easter Sunday,
Maple syrup festival, or July 1st celebrations
It was very important for us that
she needs to know the importance of wherever she is.*

⁵³ Sanskaras can also be translated as rites of passage from birth to death in the life of a person

*One thing my daughter says which is very important
 -- because we look different,
 and the advertisements and commercials
 on TV and radio here
 have an 'image' which carries a lot of weight,
 a lot of importance and
 that affects the self-esteem of our youngsters
 I have experienced it very closely
 how it (this image) affects the self-esteem of the youngsters.
 Being bullied at school
 because they are 'different'
 is quite a challenge for our youngsters.*

Aarya

*Like I said before, I feel like I have two homes
 but I don't have any.*

There is a saying in Hindi which could quantify where we are

धोबी का कुत्ता | ना घर का | ना बहार का

Dhobi ka kutta / na ghar ka / na ghat ka!

*[Like a washer-man's dog, you don't belong
 there,
 you are not here, you are nobody's
 You are just in the middle of nowhere]*

*Because whatever you say,
 this is my life
 and this is where I am going to be.
 Yes, sometimes you feel like
 you don't belong in either place*

Just as one exiles oneself from
 one's culture to inhabit anew, one
 also returns to it as a guest, rather
 than as a host or an owner, to
 hear its voices afresh.
 (Trinh Minh-ha, 1999, in
 conversation with Homi Bhabha,
 p. 22)

*but at the same time you try to get merged into the culture here
by doing different things.*

*I personally have chosen to be a volunteer at the hospital here
and I find that helps me
because I know I am contributing something
to the society where I am.*

*At the same time,
I try to contribute to the society back home
by giving money to support charities
that I know are doing a lot of good work there.*

*So that way, I keep in touch with what /where I come from
and I also keep myself in touch with where I am.*

*I volunteer with the community of people who speak my language
because I wanted my children to have that contact
and to have that backup net.*

*By taking part in community programs
and helping out wherever we can,
we have created a social network
of surrogate families here.*

Our children feel that too.

They know they can depend on these families.

That's what you want in life anyway.

You don't want to be a small island with nothing.

You want to be connected in life in some way or another.

*For our children, there won't be Trishanku feeling
because they have grown up here.*

But for people who live away like that,

Trishanku feeling will not go away.

It does not matter which country / province you come from.

I talked to somebody at work who is from Europe

*and she has exactly the same feeling of being lost,
of not belonging anywhere,
and it was kind of uncanny.*

Aparna

*Yes, [I think of this] when I see my children.
They are born here and brought up here.
Whatever we used to do back home in India culture-wise,
they don't do [follow] it.
They do [behave] like Canadian children.
They are completely Canadian-ized
even though we don't accept emotionally.
Today my daughter bought a gown for a wedding
it is shoulder-less [off-shoulder dress].
Only straps on the shoulder
and the whole shoulder is open you know
which we can't accept in India!
That is the biggest difference.
Whenever I wear a saree,
my whole body has to be covered.
That is the very beauty of a saree in India,
with 6 metres and one material
you can cover your whole body from neck to toe.
Like I said
your body is only for yourself
not to show anybody.
Even after 26 years here,
I can't accept that as an Indian.
But I have to accept.*

*Of course the time is changing
the (generation) gap makes a difference.*

*I see myself and my daughter
and the gap.*

*So even though they are mixed-up,
they are in-between
half-Canadian- half-Indian.*

I have to accept.

I can't refuse.

*Then they go away from you
they don't want to be with you
because that is what they love.*

*Their peers, their classmates
are doing the same thing
so they want to be one of them.*

*My children,
if they want to be like me,
typical Indian,
then the classmates won't like her[them].*

They won't be friendly with her then.

Let it go!

You have to let go.

*You can't be like a typical Indian here
can't wear the bindi, or Indian jewelry,
looks so weird.*

*People look at you, they stare at you
Naturally you don't want to stand-out.*

Gowri

*Trishanku feeling because of the 2 cultures
 we have gone through in our lifetime.
 It is also because of our accent.
 When you go home you realize that your accent has changed
 but not to the extent that you can speak like a 'native' Canadian
 that is why we feel we are not there nor here.
 Our habits have changed.
 We have lived here so long,
 whether we know it or not
 it has changed.
 Our way of living, our way of thinking
 everything has changed.
 These days it doesn't feel as if I am in-between 2 cultures.
 We feel we are privileged to live in a society
 where we have a say
 whereas back home we,
 (the 1st generation immigrants),
 don't have a say.
 Our children feel that they are Canadian
 and they say that they are Canadian.
 I don't think I would like to interfere in anything
 Indian anymore –
 that is just a place you visit
 to have a connection with your family.
 But in Canada we have a say in politics,
 in the society, and
 we know that our opinion matters
 and that is why this has become a home now.
 For me as a person, I have more freedom.*

The more one looks at one's own
 culture, the more one sees that there
 is no such thing as a place that one
 can return to safely
 (Trinh, Minh-ha, 1999, in Painted
 Power with Homi Bhabha, p.22)

*The society does not interfere in so many things
 like the way I dress -
 I can wear jeans at my age.
 I am not talking about the present day India,
 I am talking about the India I left
 where women after a certain age
 would only wear traditional sarees.
 But here there is no such restriction.
 Even with education,
 here there is no age limit to go into higher studies
 which is really good.
 I have taken courses
 and I have more independence here for sure.
 I have my life here now.
 I have lived here longer than I have lived in India.
 I don't know the India that I left anymore
 This is home now.*

Food often serves as common
 grounds for families, binding
 them together through tastes
 and events such as mealtimes.
 (Diane Tye, 2010, in *Baking as
 Biography*, p.27)

Shreesha

*The more you cook Indian food
 it keeps your connection with the place
 The more I was getting used to cooking the food
 here,
 I was losing my attachment from there.
 Not having my immediate family in India
 has reduced that 'caught-in-between-2-worlds'
 feeling remarkably.
 But when my parents were there
 I used to feel*

'Oh! When am I going to go back and see them again?'

Now, I want to go to the USA

and see them all the time.

The longing to go back is more when you are new.

The more you live here,

the more you get integrated here

you are busy in your life

you have family

you have friends

you have your own circle

you have your own activities.

So slowly but steadily you forget.

I would say that I would not want to forget

but what can you do?

That's life!

I try to remember things that are there.

There are times when we didn't have Diwali

or other festivals

because, either you forget,

or there was no calendar.

There was no internet to tell you and remind you.

There of course, it will be bombarded on TV,

internet, malls, in every store.

So even if you forget, they don't want you to forget.

They want you to go buy stuff.

Also when my parents told me 'it is this festival',

I would say, 'It is just me here celebrating.

There is nobody else doing it.'

So up till about 10-15 years

I must have missed India a lot.

But now?
Not as much.
My children are calling this place as home.
Canada is home for them.
So when they say that,
then I want to be where the home is for them.
When we say home, it is there.
For some people it is still there.
But now when I don't have a family there,
it is hard for me.
Having an extended family is just not the same.
These things were relevant for me until my mom was alive.
I would miss a lot when my mom was there and my dad too,
and I would think 'when are they going to see the children?'
Now of course with Facetime and Skype
I am able to speak to my dad.
It is amazing that my Canadian boss
knows all about the Indian festivals and programs
but I am not so desperate that I have to hold on to them.

Maanasi

Trishanku!
When somebody asks me 'why don't you go back to India?'
then I say 'Don't even talk about it.'
Basically we have decided that we will stay here.
We are happy here.
The only part that worries me is
my parents as they get older
They are there and we feel we are not doing our part

that is why this Trishanku.
When I came here I had to go back to the university
study for 3 years
and then spend time looking for a job.
Now we are settled here
we don't want to go back to India at this stage.
Although sometimes we feel that we should go back,
we know that is not going to happen and we know the reason behind it
so we don't have this Trishanku feeling
'Should I stay or should I go?'
I will stay here.
Of course there are 2 or 3 points which bother us.
When it is Diwali
there is no celebration mood outside
and nobody at my office knows that I am celebrating Diwali.
That is when I feel bad about it.
During Christmas time we have holidays
but we don't celebrate Christmas as such.
I feel bad that I cannot blend
into the Canadian culture
and celebrate Christmas like these people do.
When we have these discussions about going back,
I give an example of Abhimanyu⁵⁴

In the children's book *Lights for Gita*, Rachna Gilmore (1994) tells us the story of a young girl named Gita, who learns to celebrate Diwali in her new home even though at first she is disappointed that "it wouldn't be like Diwali at her grandparents [in Delhi]" (p.5)

⁵⁴ Abhimanyu was a mythological character in the epic story of Mahabharata. He was the son of Arjun, the brave warrior, who was imparted the knowledge of the Bhagawad Gita by Lord Krishna.

The story of Abhimanyu

The epic Mahabharata War was waged between two sets of cousins –the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun, (who was one of the Pandavas), was still in his mother’s womb when he heard his mother’s brother, Krishna telling her how to enter a ‘Chakravyuha’¹ (a labyrinthine war strategy). Abhimanyu heard this part but he was not able to hear the other part of how to come out of that circle / labyrinth. So during this war, brave Abhimanyu entered the Chakravyuha¹ and fought valiantly, but because he didn’t know how to come out, he was not able to escape and thus died fighting the Kauravas, who were his own relatives.

*Now we are in Canada, we are well settled,
so in a way there is no way out now.
So we have to stay put and do whatever we can to assimilate
and get used to Canada.
It is not that we **had** to come
it was our choice
but now going back is difficult.
I have friends who always talk about going back.
We are staying
what-ever happens.
We came here for a better life and for the children.*

Reaching the centre of my sojourn

*Story is a search for community. As we tell each other who we really are,
we find the people with whom we really belong. Story brings us home*

Baldwin, 2005, p. 219



At this point, I have walked to the centre of the labyrinth, “often called the rosette” (Artress, 1995/2006, p. 58), like the innermost sanctum in a temple [*gaabhaara* | गभारा], and in a way I have reached *home*. Unlike *Abhimanyu*, I can see the way out and no one is blocking my way to the exit / entry like they did on the *Chakravyuha*. I am humbled and grateful for all the stories these women have openly shared with me. I no longer feel as if I am *a-lone traveler* walking amongst strangers because I had travelling companions with me on this pilgrimage / yatra. These companions or co-participants were from all walks of life. They were home-makers, day-care providers, translators / interpreters, a writer / yoga teacher / meditator, managers, business owners, a nurse and a peer-supporter for abused women, social workers, scientists, engineers, dedicated volunteers, devout, religious and spiritual mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and grand/mothers who were rebels / revolutionaries in their own ways. I pause here as I contemplate on the stories I have heard / received / gathered so far, and yet I want to know more about this elusive word, feeling, emotion called *home*. Even though Canada is home now, I will always be a Bombay-ite or Mumbai-kar (someone from Bombay / Mumbai) and I have learned

to be comfortable in my liminal hyphe-nations. But sometimes in my vulnerable moments, I still experience the emotions in this Marathi song by the famous Marathi poet Shanta Shelké:

जीवलगा | राहिले रे दूर घर माझे |⁵⁵

jeevalaga rahiley re duur ghara maazey

[My dearest | I have left my home far behind]

But it is also true that...

I never left home.

I carried it away

with me – here in my darkness

in myself. If I go back, retrace my steps.

I will not find

that first home anywhere outside

in that mother-land place.

Bhatt, 1995, p.105

So I begin my outward journey back towards the entrance of the labyrinth, and I return to my existential query to understand the live(d) experiences of Indo-Canadian women – m/others, wives, grand/mothers, “guardians of [cultures and] traditions, keepers of home, and bearers of language and stories” (Trinh, 2011), as they (re)produce and (re)create this notion called ho[me] with/in these diasporic spaces. As Gedalof (2003) says, “here the myth of home as a source of stable origins clashes against the reality of being called upon to reproduce that ‘home’ in the context of forced displacement” (p.101). Thus, home as a concept can “integrate many levels of meaning and emotion: home can be a structure, a town, a country and a feeling...[where] home, belonging, and identity are interconnected but not interchangeable” (Kelley, 2013, p. 9-10). For a

⁵⁵ http://www.aathavanitli-gani.com/Song/Jivalaga_Rahile_Re_Dur

child at play, home could be as simple as a blanket on the floor with her toys and books on it, or a child-size doll house or tree-house built by a doting (grand)father. Tang (2003) maintains that it is complicated for the “diasporic person to define or find home” (p. 29) and yet, we are all in search of this place where “one is compelled to find stability and happiness” (Trinh, 2011). According to Rutherford (1990), “[h]ome is where we speak from...our struggles for identity and a sense of personal coherence and intelligibility are centred on this threshold between interior and exterior, between self and other (p. 24).

Rushdie (1991) tells us that in his desire to restore his past, he creates an “imaginary” or “a memory of his India” in his books and his writings where, he “creates fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (p. 10). Behar (1996) calls this, “the paradoxes of attachment and displacement” (p. 81). Yet, as Hall (1990) explains, “the past continues to speak to us. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth” (p. 226). Trinh (2011) writes “home for the exile and the migrant can hardly be more than a transitional or circumstantial place, since the ‘original’ home neither can be recaptured nor can its presence/absence be entirely banished in the ‘remade’ home...For writers in exile true home is to be found, not in houses, but in writing” (p. 33-34). Palulis (2003) echoes Trinh, by saying “in exile, we enter a diaspora of words” (p.260).

Fludernik, (2003), says, that the one thing common to all i-m-migrants is the “hope to return home – a hope that in many cases persists beyond the point where one has settled down permanently abroad” (p. xv). This is true for some Indo-Canadians, who talk about going back *home* after they retire, and I also know of a few families who have actually re-turned to India. Searching for home involves the risk of getting “lost in the space of transformation” (Tang, 2003, p. 28), and homecoming requires the “constant task of translating and transmigration

between familiar and unfamiliar surroundings...it is a never-ending dialogue with self and other that requires letting go of one's prejudices and preoccupations" (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 226). Thompson & Tyagi (1996) tell us that what constitutes home reveals much about identity, belonging, meaning and activism and writing thus becomes "a way of finding home" (p. xv). I too feel that my quest of finding ho[me] is through my re/search, and through my love of reading and listening to stories. What about my participants? Let's have a listen:

Métissage Four: A home by any other name...

Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires

Ellis, 2013, p. 10

Q.4. According to Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier and Sheller (2003) "Migration is experienced in relation to home and belonging." How do you define "home?"

What are some of your experiences of making a home in Canada?

Roopa

I came when I was 20.

Canada is home.

Home is security, sense of belonging,

sense of 'my everything' is here!

My children, my home, my development has been here

my security is here.

Even with family,

my brothers have grown up as adults without me

and I have grown to who I am without them

*so, biology aside,
 it is just a 'word' [in name's sake only] that I have a brother in India.
 I just don't have it in me to go to India after my parents passed away.
 On my last visit to India,
 I had said something to my mom like
 "when I get home, I will do that"
 and she was all huffed up for a couple of hours.
 So I said 'what's up mom, why are you upset with me?'
 and she said
 "You called Canada home.
 इसका मतलब है – [Iska matlab hai / You mean to say that]
 you will never come back?"
 and I said,
 I am not coming back. I can't deal with India at all anymore.
 A 3 week visit is my ultimate limit.
 2 weeks is what I'll do but I can't deal with it.
 I don't think she liked it.
 I think she resented it for a long time.
 But home is here and is in here for a long time.
 I Think Canadian.
 My mom died 17 years ago.*

Maya

*I remember in 1986 when I went back to India
 I felt I didn't belong in India or in Canada
 I didn't know where I belonged.
 A friend said to me,
 'If you don't belong to yourself where can you belong?'
 Since then I have made an effort to belong to myself*

*and now after 27 years in Ottawa,
 I am moving to Calgary.
 I am going to make a home for the last time.
 Another home, another city!
 There is unease as it is in any move
 but there is no fear or anxiety
 like when I moved from India to Canada.
 My father was 68
 when he immigrated to Toronto from Bombay
 so I joke with my friends
 that it must be the 68 year-old itch
 because I will be 68 when I reach Calgary!
 But I love Ottawa.
 I really enjoyed it
 it has become a habit
 it is time for another adventure.
 We are a bit too comfortable here
 so, it is time for another change.
 Home is where I am,
 that is where home is.*

Kanak

*Home for me is a secure loving place
 where you feel comfortable.
 And with that all the soft things that you are given there
 and there is a responsibility that goes with it.
 You create that and your little world.
 My home is very open
 like an open Indian joint family kind of thing.
 First my in-laws stayed with us,*

*then when my father got sick,
my mom's responsibility landed on me.
I am lucky that my husband participated in that
otherwise not many families in India would accept
the girls' parents to stay with them.
Maybe in old times it worked in India
where everybody did their duty.
Now the sons are not doing it
and then what happens to the girls' parents?
My mom feels guilty too for staying with me
I said:
'You should feel good and proud
because you have done nothing wrong.
Why are you feeling bad?'
So I find in our culture,
we talk big and do very little
and boys are forgiven for doing very little.
I am mad at that aspect.
I think mothers have to change
they have to start thinking that
'my daughter is like my son.'
I am doing the same duties as the son
and you treat me like a 3rd class citizen?
I was shocked to see senior homes in Bombay.
So you see people are changing!
It is much easier making a home in Canada
I know the physical work is very hard
there is no nanny or help
but if you sustain yourself for 10-15 years
it is very wonderful,*

*very satisfying to see what you have done,
your potential, your family,
your children and all that.*

Devi

What is home?

What is belongingness?

*When I was in India that was home
when I came here and specially now,
being parents
and our children grown up and all,
so this is home.*

*If I have to go to a retirement home
like a nursing home in the next phase or whatever
that will be home.*

And the belongingness?

I belong wherever I am.

*I don't feel like I belong there or I don't belong here,
or whenever I go to India that I belong in Canada.*

I never felt like 'oh, we can't live in India'

Perhaps I cannot, I don't know.

Maybe once you go and see

I will adapt and work around the problems or issues.

If I have to move there, I will move.

I won't say 'oh my God, I cannot move there!'

If I take a course or a path

I will take whatever comes with it.

My friend says I know how to compartmentalize my life.

I believe in living in the moment

*So for me, home is where I am
And belonging is where I am.*

Padma

*As I grew up in a joint family back home,
the home was always vibrant.
Things were going on
and our home was full of people.
We used to have less room and more people.
Some days we would come back from school
and there won't be any food
because people had come and food is gone.
Sometimes we would be saying
'mom, where do I sleep tonight?'
But when I came here,
that is exactly what I missed!
There is a house,
and there is no noise,
no sound, no one else except for you.
Now it was up to me to make this house my home.
How to fill it up with stuff that will make me feel that I am home?
So we made the puja room right away
that is the first thing that made me feel ok
that something here reminds me of home.
Then slowly the decorations here and there
the albums, more pictures.
Then you have to bring the life into that house to make it home,
so with music and dance,
with Indian music, Hindi music,*

fill it up with that.
I had a daycare and
my front door and back door were always open
and the children were literally going
from one side and coming back on the other
and that made me feel like home
A house filled with people.
When we came to Ottawa
I met an Aunty from India
she helped me a lot
and did everything for me.
She is like a mom to me and my children
she totally took my finger and guided me
took me out of the house
and put me in a place where I can be myself
and show my potential
and contribute to the Indian community
and the Canadian community.

Displacement may produce
 alienation, but it also facilitates
 new ways of thinking, and new
 ways of envisioning one's life
 (Carol Kelley, 2013, in
Accidental Immigrants... p.
 117)

Gomati

Where I am is my home.
No more attachment to any place or anything
and that is why I am at peace.
There is great support in Ottawa
and if you find the right people to guide you
you are saved.
We are doing much better
than we would have in India.
Society gives titles / labels to women

*you are educated / uneducated,
 you are this, you are that
 and that is bullying.
 I went through that and I was shaken.
 One shouldn't feel that when one goes to visit family.
 'How do you define home?'
 Very difficult question
 Keep your hand on your heart
 and when you hear your heart beat,
 that is my / your home.
 "You don't need to look outside yourself"
 says my Guru
 (With her hand on her heart)
 "You have everything here."
 Home is here.*

Aarya

*Home is where I belong emotionally
 that's home.
 To me, I don't think it is one single place.
 Like I said before,
 I look forward to going home every year,
 to be with my family.
 That is the emotional attachment there.
 But then when I am there,
 I want to come home here
 because again, I have got emotional attachment here.
 So, to me, wherever my emotions belong, is my home,
 so it could be here, it could be India,*

*it could be anywhere
 where ever my emotions are attached is my home.*

Aparna

*Home means
 mother, father, brother, sister, children
 everybody together
 which we left behind.
 It can't be here.
 I don't think it is.
 Whatever was India was India.
 India is a warm country you know.
 People are so loving.
 Your neighbours will ask questions
 for each and every thing.
 'Oh, what did you buy?'
 'Oh, how was your day?'
 Here, nobody cares
 nobody says even hi
 until and unless we are face-to-face.
 We never knock on the door.
 But in India,
 anytime you go to anybody's house,
 they will offer tea or food also,
 they will chat for hours.
 But here? No!
 I think people become like the weather
 cold country, cold people
 until and unless you are invited,*

*you don't go to anybody's house.
[But] I feel that's a very good idea also.*

Gowri

*Home is where you can feel a belonging
where we have a say [voice].
When you belong somewhere, you have a say.
That is why I feel it's a home now.
When we came to Canada, we were in Toronto for a few months.
That is where most of the immigrants come
so you didn't feel out of place
you see many people are in the same boat as you are.
Then finding a job
maybe not to our expectation,
but for day-to-day living it wasn't difficult.
We were ready to work hard
and we were ready to start from the beginning.
We realized that to go higher
you have to have a base
you need to have experiences
local references and local experiences.
We had lived in the basement apartment of a Professor's house.
He was a learned professor,
and he was very helpful.
They welcomed us and
they became a family for us.
They gave us all the tips about how to start.
When we came to Ottawa, we met some Indians
and then we started having a bigger circle of friends.*

*My husband always says
 'We have to give more than what we take'
 So I have made that my philosophy
 I help out at the soup kitchen,
 in the group homes
 and at the Community Centres.
 I say that to the children too
 'Don't judge, do what you can!'
 That is what I try.*

Shreesha

*My children are calling this place as home.
 Canada is home for them.
 So when they say that,
 then I want to be where the home is for them.
 When we say home, it is there.
 For some people it is still there
 But when I don't have a family there now,
 it is hard for me.
 I have extended family
 but it is just not the same.
 So that is one of the things
 that reduces your connection to home.
 I would still like to know
 which Bollywood movie is coming out
 and who is the actor.
 Home is where you get the feeling of belonging.
 Over the years I have lost connection with friends back there.
 Of course Facebook has brought it back.*

*For almost 20 years, I was not in touch with anything.
 Also, if I don't go to India for a long time then I lose touch
 but if I go back there and talk their language,
 then I feel
 'ok they speak a similar sort of language'.
 From the past 10 years
 I have never stayed there to feel belonged there.
 When I meet people here,
 even local Indians here,
 whether they are Kannadigas, Tamils, Bengalis⁵⁶
 or any other group,
 they are also in the same boat as me.
 We are able to relate
 and we are happy just seeing each other
 and we feel like YES, we belong here.*

Maanasi

*Home is a welcoming space
 where I can share anything
 with loving people around and place to relax.
 We didn't have any experience as such
 of making a home in India.
 My mom did that.
 Even for making small decisions about children
 we are doing it for the first time.
 In India you have cousins, your friends, and friends' friends
 but here everything is a learning experience.
 You do it and then you learn and*

⁵⁶ Regional groups in India: Kannadigas originally from Karnataka, Tamils originally from Chennai (Madras) and Bengalis originally from Calcutta

*then maybe for my next child I will improve
 based on my experience with my first child.
 This lack of experience was always there for making any decision.
 But although we didn't have family,
 there are friends here who were always helpful
 the community people were always there.
 So we always look to them for any advice.
 Personally I think that the community support
 has played a big role in how we settled in Canada,
 and how we made our home.
 They were sometimes like our parents
 and sometimes our friends.
 When I taught at the International Language School
 parents were so happy.
 The children would go home
 and read to the parents in their mother-tongue
 they were also able to communicate with their grandparents.
 In India, it is a fashion to speak in English.
 Children here try to speak in their mother-tongue
 although it is not a 100%.
 The community has Diwali celebration
 and Ganapati celebration
 I think the main objective is to get together and have a party.
 You get to wear your sarees and all
 Children learn about Indian culture
 and meet their Indian friends who have
 'Indian-Indian parents who have strict rules about
 everything!'
 I think it also gives the children an opportunity
 to talk to other children about their 'Suffering'*

Echoes of the Chinese
 mother's parenting
 style...
 (Amy Chua, 2011 in
 the *Battle hymn of the
 Tiger Mother*)

Suffering because of the parenting style!

Like my friend's son says:

We [parents] are all Indian when it comes to [our children's] report cards

But we are also Canadian because we cheer our children during hockey games.

So we are Indo-Canadian!

Métissage Five: Our Treasures

Taken collectively, these objects contain a women's history, a history of what women have found important...it is a record of their "stories to live by"

Cairns & Silverman, 2004, p. xviii

Most women I know are collectors and hoarders of things. Some of the most common items or mementos that women keep are our (grand)mothers' recipe books, photographs, letters, jewelry and clothes. Amma had her own collection of books and photographs of her travels from around India, and her collection of articles and art pictures that she had cut out from old newspapers and magazines some of them dating back to her childhood. It was here that I first read about Virginia Woolf and "*A room of one's own!*" I now wonder what some of the women in my family might have accomplished if they had *a room of their own (both literally and metaphorically)*, and had the freedom and the choices that I have experienced in Canada! Tye (2010) claims that her book *Baking as Biography*, while celebrating her mother's life, also "recognizes ways in which the demands of domesticity restrained her" (p. 29) and that is true for my Amma, my Aajji and my Ammamma, and for almost all the women I know.

Wedding Sarees: souvenirs of my life - A memoir

I brought my parents' wedding picture and Amma's wedding sarees with me after she passed away. The sarees are old and I will never really wear them, but for me,

they are a reminder of my parents' presence on this earth. I have also saved all the letters Amma & Pappa wrote to me when I first came to Canada.



My parents, Gurudatt & Sheetala (Sita) Balsawer, on their wedding day April 18, 1960 (Bombay, India)

Clandinin (2013) says that we inquire into “photographs, journals, keepsakes, treasures, or memory box artifacts as part of our autobiographical narrative inquiries”, and this helps us to understand “who we are, and are becoming, in relation to potential participants and particular phenomena” (p. 43). Going by the assumption that women are the archivists, librarians, storytellers and bearers of culture and traditions, I wanted to talk to my participants about the objects they collect and keep for sentimental reasons, and hear the stories behind these treasures.

Q. 5. Women are known to preserve things and objects throughout their lives. Are there any memorable objects or things that you treasure and/or cherish? Would you like to tell me about these treasures of yours?

Roopa

*My pictures are my most memorable treasures
We have some Indian art and such at home
That I won't part with that easily
My mom had jewelry from her mother
She gave it to me
And I have given it to my daughter
I also have a salwar-kameez suit
that my mother-in-law got married in.*

Maya

*Yes, there are many things I do treasure.
That is my daughter's desk
That was the first desk she had as a little girl
I picked it up off the street for \$50 in a sale
and she used it.
When she grew up she needed a proper one.
I treasure that.
She was 14 when she died.
She didn't suffer
she had brain hemorrhage
she was gone in a minute!
It was a good death.
Shock to us!
Her death complicated our experiences as immigrants.
It was very very hard when she passed away.*

Anthropology
[Autoethnography /
Research] that doesn't
break your heart just
isn't worth doing
anymore.
(Behar, 1996, p. 177)

*But you know there is so much help in Canada
 We have the Bereaved Families of Ontario
 And they helped me.
 At least I didn't lose friendships
 by howling on their shoulders.
 Yes, I do preserve things.
 I have a set of books in Urdu
 My father was a connoisseur of Urdu poetry.
 I don't read Urdu.
 After 50 years of keeping them
 I am wondering who I should give them to
 but I can't gift them because they are his -
 his legacy.
 There are a lot of things like that I hold on to
 but not too many
 because when you move as often as I have moved,
 this will be my 12th move - to Calgary
 I am pretty well a Carpetbagger
 and a nomad
 and you can't hold everything!
 The Ganga-jalni ⁵⁷with Ganga in it
 goes everywhere with us.*

Kanak

*I have a lot of albums.
 I have my grandma's poems and
 her letters to me when I came here.*

⁵⁷ Many Hindus keep a container of the holy water from the river Ganga / Ganges in their homes. Dinking the water of the Ganges is supposed to cleanse a person of all their sins and it is used to administer the last rites to a dying person. <http://history-of-hinduism.blogspot.ca/2010/06/water-and-hinduism.html>

*She was a big reader and a writer
and she would write quotes from Ramayana⁵⁸
on how to make a home here,
how to listen to my husband, those kinds of things.
Lessons they send you.*

*Some work and some don't work here.
But it is nice to remember them by.*

*Her world was a very small world
they have not come out of that bubble
so they relate everything to Ramacharit Manas⁵⁹
but it doesn't work here.*

*They don't understand how we can live
in a 1-bedroom apartment here.*

You have to live this life to know what one goes through.

So later on,

I stopped telling them what was going on here.

*It takes a long time to find who you are,
and what you want to do
because it [the immigration] shakes you.*

*When you leave your roots,
you are in shock.*

Even buying groceries was so frightening and terrifying

'Oh God, what am I buying?

Can I even cook?

Will this money be wasted?'

All little things

[They] were so hard.

When I look back I wonder

'Why did I feel like that?

[M]y grandmother's world
/ was framed by her
bedroom window/...
a resistant, uncontrollable
world.
(Leggo, 1995, p.7)

⁵⁸ The Ramayana is the mythological story of the virtuous King Rama and his wife Sita.

⁵⁹ Hindi version of the epic Ramayana

Devi

I have my grandmother's paintings.

She did them when she was here



*I hold on to them only because they are my grandmother's
and not because I want to hold on to my Indian-ness.*

*I have my Puja / prayer room (shrine to the deities)
that is the way we used to pray
and I want to continue like that.*

*I have taught my children the Hindu way of praying
but I don't force them.*

*You know they may rebel in the beginning
but as they are becoming young adults,
you will see them going
and doing pradakshinas (circumambulations) in the temple.*

Padma

*For me it is not really a material thing that I preserve
it is not a thing that I can touch or feel
but the way I grew up.
I grew up with my great grandmother, my grandfather,
my grandfather's younger brother's wife and their children*

*We were all in one house
 4-5 generations in one house.
 That is what I treasure the most
 and what I got out of it.
 The respect between all of them
 the sacrifice my mom had made to make all this happen
 that is what has given me the strength to go on here
 and that is what I cherish the most.*



Gomati

*This is my Geeta (Gita).⁶⁰
 When I got ready to leave India
 I asked my Ajja (grand-father) for his Gita.
 I was very selfish to take it from him at that time
 but he gave it to me.
 I learned the meaning of Vairagya
 (relinquishing / letting go) from him.
 I pick it up to read the stanzas
 I have other religious books too
 I read them when I am in turmoil.
 My Blackberry playbook is full of bookmarks
 to songs and religious discourses.
 I have lots of pictures from years
 my beautiful memories.
 The project is to organize them.*

⁶⁰ The Gita (Geeta) or the Bhagvad-Gita contains the teachings of Lord Krishna which were imparted to the warrior Arjuna during the epic war Mahabharata. Even though it is an ancient religious text, it is also the study of human behaviour and thus, relevant to modern day society.

Aarya

*Things can come and go,
memories you treasure for always.
Objects have memories attached to them
that is what makes them more precious.
For instance, when I first started working
about 45 years ago,
with my 1st pay I bought my grandmother a beautiful woollen shawl.
When my grandmother passed away
she left the shawl to me
she had used that shawl very very nicely,
To me, that is one of the most precious objects I have
because that is what my grandmother left for me.
The shawl is not expensive at all
because in the beginning
when I started working,
I couldn't afford to buy her expensive things.
But that is one of my precious things.
Same way, my mother-in-law had a saree,
which she had embroidered herself
and when she passed away,
she left that saree for me.
Again, that is a precious object for me
because my m-i-l had done the work herself.
When my mother came,
she had brought material with the printed design
and she embroidered that
she gave it to me to make a salwar kameez.
Now that again is my precious object
because my mother embroidered that for me.*

*My mother made woolen sweaters for both my children.
 My children remember those sweaters very much.
 As a matter of fact,
 once my children were done with those sweaters,
 they went to my friends' children,
 and then they came back to my nephew.
 So those were precious things for me.
 Again none of these things are very expensive.
 It is the emotions attached to it
 that is what makes that important or precious.
 To me, expensive things like jewelry and all that,
 they are costly but they are not precious and
 that is the difference between the two.*

Aparna

*I don't have many treasures
 only a few pictures
 and some religious books.
 Whatever I have is all
 because of the Grace of God.
 My memory is my treasure.*

Gowri

*In our puja [prayer] room everything is from back home.
 Those are the things we have bought from there
 We follow the rituals from back home
 so our children will know their roots
 where we come from.*

*We still do our traditional cooking -
not every day,
but at least 2 days in a week.
I have my sarees, dresses, jewelry
Half of it is what we came with.
Traditions are still there.
We have adapted to this culture
but some of the traditions are still continuing.*

Shreesha

*I brought a few things
Like statues of gods
and of course some jewelry
cooking pots and pans,
clothing and some decorative items
like sandalwood products.
I have a couple of saris which are 25 years old.*

Maanasi

*I don't remember at the top of my head
of something that I keep with me
maybe because we do everything through technology.
If I want to talk to my mom,
it is very easy to pick up the phone.
But 15 years back when I came here,
my mom used to send me letters.
At that time email was not there
and phone call was expensive.*

*I have those letters from my mom.
 She used to write every detail about everything
 and she always used to worry about me.
 Those are my treasures that I still have
 and I can re-read them again and again.*

Defining Our-selves through our Treasures

Cairns & Silverman (2004) tell us that they wanted to understand women's lives by looking at the things that women keep and the reasons for holding on to these keepsakes / treasures/mementos because:

Every woman's story is a story of creating herself. The act of keeping a particular thing is always an act of self-definition in which the object represents both an aspect of the self and a way into self-knowledge. Who was I? Who am I now? What is my heritage? What do my experiences tell me about myself? An object anchors its owner in time and place, and positions her as a member of a community or a network of relationships.

p.1

As the above quote suggests, my participants also had treasures that evoked memories of a distant past, reminding us / them of who they were, and reminding us of the *present / absent* people or the "*significant others*" (Mead, 1934) in our lives. Taylor (1994) says that:

We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others –our parents, for instance –and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live.

p. 32-33

Like Maanasi, most of us have preserved the letters we received from our (grand)/parents because when we first came here 20-30 years ago, a phone call to India was very expensive, so we waited impatiently for these letters and then hung on to every word in them. We all maintain a shrine / prayer (puja) space in our homes to honour the different deities / idols that are supposed to ward off the evil

“I” / eye, and bring about peace, prosperity and happiness in our lives. The idols also keep us connected to



our customs and traditions, our memories, our (her)stories, our mythology(ies), and our identities. Amma used to send me these idols hoping they would protect me when I went through my challenging moments. I have placed them on a shelf in my kitchen just like we had them back home in Bombay and I call them my *Kitchen Gods*. Every idol reminds me of the mythological or folk stories / parables Amma would narrate. Surprisingly, even now, just as in my childhood, these stories help me deal with many situations in my life; except that sometimes in this very *practical* world, I forget to *call on* these resources! Amma would say that even the Gods who wandered this Earth in a human *avatar* / incarnation had to suffer, and she hoped that these stories would give me the strength to surmount the obstacles I was facing. Hasebe-Ludt et al (2009) tell us that “it is myth that has helped humans grapple with the ultimate meaning of human experience...the answer to the [deeply spiritual and psychological] questions of who we are, how we come to be who we are, and where we come from” (p. 41). Some of my participants also narrated Indian and Buddhist mythological and spiritual stories / fables to highlight their own experiences.

Like Shreesha I / we have sarees that are 25 (plus) years old which are very seldom worn

Possession of two languages means participation in two physical and cultural realms.

(Memmi, 1967, p. 107)

here, and yet we keep them for sentimental reasons; and I still go saree-shopping every time I visit India. These days when I have the *rare* opportunity to wear a saree, I almost feel like I am performing an *Indian* role / I-identity, and I even find myself walking and talking a little differently in this *ambiguous / ambivalent Avatar*

[*incarnation*] / I-identity. It might also be because when I am dressed in a saree, *strangers* (sometimes even friends / colleagues) feel free / *emboldened even*, to approach me to ask if they can touch or feel my saree! I have never experienced anything like this when I am in my *regular Western* attire. My sarees also remind me of my days as a



Veena (L) attending a college annual function with a colleague (circa 1990)

young English Teacher in a Junior College at the University of Bombay, when I had to wear a saree every day, because apparently I looked younger than my Grade 11 -12 students. I had gone back to teach at my Alma Mater after acquiring my M.A. (English) and B.Ed. qualifications, and the College Principal used to say that a saree was the most appropriate attire for female teachers / professors. The male teachers were never expected to wear the traditional Indian men's attire. Now I hear that things have changed, and female teachers in Colleges can go to teach in salwar-kameez suits (long Indian tops and pants) or wear *Western* outfits.

Back to the Be/ginn/ing

May my story be beautiful and unwind like a long thread...

Trinh, 1989, p. 4

Gathering all these story gifts and treasures “*given selflessly and without expectation of return*” (Dwayne Donald 2012 in his praise for the book *A Heart of Wisdom*), I have reached the



end (beginning) of the labyrinth. I pause to look back one last time to give thanks to the labyrinth and to take a moment to *re-member* why I went on this walk / *yatra* / pilgrimage. I had ventured into my auto/ethnographical journey hoping that it might guide me ho[me] towards an understanding of

me/myself/others. In my proposal I had stated my perceived vulnerabilities and ambiguities, and confessed that I am more comfortable talking to women from all around the world about home / not-home, be/longing / not-be/longing; but with women from the Indo-Canadian diaspora, I feel as if these women have ‘Othered’ me for the difficult and deviant choices I have made in my life.

I had even wondered whether the Indo-Canadian women would want to share their stories with me because “sometimes I see my country people as complete strangers” (Trinh, 2011, p. 34).

Fortunately for me, my fears were un-founded and eleven (11) Indo-Canadian women responded to my call for participants, and shared their ho[me] stories with me and told me how they had learned to negotiate and navigate their hybrid *currenre* within these liminal spaces which are both home and not-home. Even though, at first they might have felt like they were *lost –in a new place, or lost in translation* (between *lift and elevator*, or between *filet and filet mignon*), in the

last 20-30 years, they had moved towards a “fruitful sense of dislocation” (Lather, 2007, p.1) and “reached a point of acceptance (of change)” (Kelley, 2013, p.118).

As I dwell here with my story treasures, I feel as if I am clutching the handkerchief with the Drumstick flowers once again, making sure I don’t spill any flowers / stories on my way back home. I feel blessed. I want to jump with joy and run around the labyrinth with my story-gifts, but I remember the *hidden / (silent) curriculum* drilled into me, from my childhood, by my elders / my significant others:

Don’t flaunt your gifts (treasures / talents)⁶¹

You will tempt the evil ‘I’ (eye) / spirits!

You are a girl.

How often should I / (we) remind you to be demure?

You are not supposed to be smarter than the boys!

It upsets your brother!

(Later on ‘brother’ was re-placed by ‘husband’)

Why don’t you understand?

After all you are the intelligent one!

(& into my teens and early twenties)

If you are so highly educated,

it will be difficult to find a husband for you!

Even in school, if we (girls) acted like we knew all the answers, we were *shush*-ed and sometimes even punished by our teachers for *disrupting* the class with our answers. The day my high school (Grade X) final results were declared, my older brother suddenly *disappeared* from home for a couple of days leaving us all in a state of panic instead of jubilation. Since then,

⁶¹ In my family, parents will not praise their own children, or highlight their talents openly for fear of incurring the Evil Eye (I).

every time I got my ‘*excellent*’ report cards I started to get anxious! My brother⁶² who always felt (and probably still feels) that I was my *Pappa*’s favourite, would often tell me: “*After all you are ONLY a girl and girls do not really matter!*” He would say that my *Aajji* had told him so. Being the first-born grand-Son in a *Hindu Brahmin* family, he was definitely my *Aajji*’s favourite.

Narayan (1997) writes about

[M]otherlands [as] spaces where fathers [men] still have most of the privileges and power, and [where] mothers and mother-cultures relate differently to their daughters than they do to their sons, imposing different demands and expecting different forms of conformity.

p. 9

My strong, independent, (*not-silent*) *Aajji*, the matriarch of our family, who literally ruled over her sons’ and their families’ lives had experienced the cruelty of the world as a young widow and at times she could be like the grandmother in the poem *Silence*:

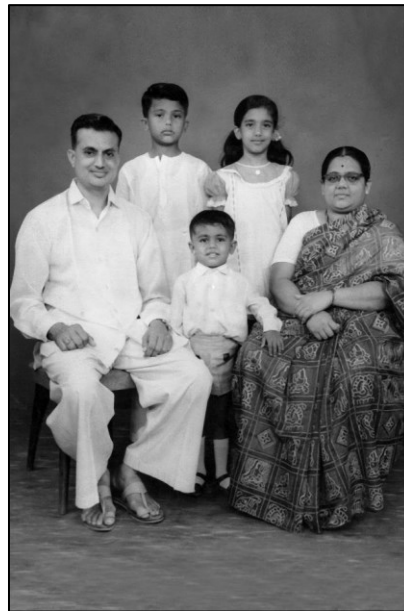
*My grandmother was... always aggrieved
Only her husband [read: men] had the cosmic right (so it was said)
to speak and be heard.*

Sengupta (1995)

Yet luckily for me, even though I was their (only) daughter, and they /we were *bound* by the social and cultural constraints of the Indian (*Hindu*) society, my parents, encouraged me to study and accorded me the same opportunities and freedom(s) as my brothers. Although, over the

⁶² CBC did a segment on the impact of sibling bullying and its lasting effects
<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-may-31-2016-1.3608620/i-am-still-petrified-of-her-sibling-bullying-and-its-lasting-effects-1.3608628>

years, *Amma* seemed to have changed her mind about how her *married* daughter should behave, while I was growing up her *mantra* was always: “*If the boys can do it, YOU can do it better!*” Having been denied the opportunity to study medicine herself, because in those days her parents felt that “*it was better to educate a boy [her brother / my uncle] than a girl,*” *Amma* made sure that I would be able to study as much as I wanted to. My *Pappa*, who had to give up his own dreams of higher education in order to support his family after his own father passed away, indulged my thirst for knowledge by paying for all my degrees [*my schooling*] in India.



Gurudatt & Sheetala (Sita)
Balsawer & family (circa 1971-
1972)

Girls and Women matter

*I will have my voice:
I will overcome the tradition of silence*

Anzaldúa, 2004, p. 271

As I linger here with all my story gifts, I am taken aback by this memory from my childhood and I realize that this is the reason I got *lost* and *stumbled* on my literary labyrinth path-way / *yatra*. Even though I am now in Canada, and for the last many years, I have lived independently and away from my br/other(s) and his ideas about women, I still got [get] *waylaid* by my inner-most fears / demons, my cultural conditioning and my insecurities and I start/ed to quest/ion the significance of my own re/search, my own Be/ing.

Ellis (2003) says that:

The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult. Often you confront things about yourself that are less than flattering...honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain.

p. xviii

I worried about how *other* people might re/act to these ho[me] stories that I have gathered, and I agonized over the fact that I was “implicating” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) my participants as well as my *significant others*. For the first time on this journey, I started to wonder if I might be committing a grave ‘sin’ [*maha-paap* | महापाप as Aajji would have said] by writing my / our story and this worry / anguish paralyzed me to such an extent that I thought I might never finish my re/search *yatra* / walk. I began questioning my “ethnographic authority” (Behar, 1996, p. 21) and wondered if I could do justice to all the stories I had collected. I know now what Esgalhado (2003) meant when she cautioned her readers by saying that:

This sort of work is hard...I encountered resistance every step of the way; steps that emerged in and through the writing...The resistance came from somewhere amidst the creation of the rubble that resulted as the autoethnographic sites were worked on...The resistance in writing, for one, is multitudinous, availing itself of every

opportunity, every word, every syntactical and semantical gesture in the writing, every possible rhythm, every cadence, and every rupture that emerges in and through the writing...[but] There is only one solution to the resistance that emerges in all these sites—to configure a way of working in and through it, to forge forward to the possibility of creating yet another site from which significance can emerge.

p. 493

I ventured on this yatra, because as an insider-outsider, I wanted to highlight the lived and living-through experiences and to catch/capture the often *silent* and unheard stories of the Indo-Canadian women in their /our own “marginalized [*ordinary*] voices” (Munro, 1998, p. 6). Little did I realize then “that’s when the real work [would] begin” (Ellis, 2003, p. xviii) in terms of “what it [really] means to be an insider in a culture” (Behar, 1996, p. 28), or how the “personal is / [becomes] political” (Behar, 1996; Holman-Jones, 2005), or how this auto/ethnographical walk / yatra or life-story-writing would lead me to un/ravel and un/tangle my own marginalized/ *silenced* voices /selves and compel me to face my own demon(s) and *evil T’ / spirits*, and my insecurities and [hopefully and eventually] bring about a catharsis. It is true then what Ellis, et al (2011), state that “writing personal stories can be therapeutic for authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences” (p. 6) and yet, I was not prepared for the flood of emotions that washed over me, nor for being turned upside-down and inside-out (all in my own mind / head). I was shocked / scared at issues that surfaced, the emotions that refused to stay quiet and the *silent* tears that almost blinded me. I thought I had taken care of all my emotions / *baggage* and *washed / discarded all my dirty laundry* but then perhaps, like Sophie Tamas (2009) says, “when I ran out of money for therapy, I went back to school. I needed –I still need to make sense of what happened.” I found myself be/com/ing very sensitive and silent as if

I had lost my voice and my words and it was impossible for me to write. It struck me that once again I had under-estimated my *vulnerabilities* or maybe I was naive (*stupid*) to think that this kind of research would not affect me personally.

Here, I re-turn to Richardson's (1994 /2000) article *Writing: A method of Inquiry*, to remember the reasons for writing –

Writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing” –a method of discovery and analysis (p. 516) ... Writing is always partial, local, and situational, and our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it –but only partially present, for in our work we repress parts of ourselves, too (p. 520)... When experimenting with form, ethnographers learn about the topic and about themselves what is unknowable [and] unimaginable... [By] trying out evocative forms... we find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties.

p. 521

I began to wonder why it was so hard to write about my live(d) experiences. I had already lived through them and also fought against the injustices meted out to me as a sister / wife / woman! I also made innumerable visits to doctors, counsellors, psychiatrists, even astrologers and tarot card readers –literally any-one who could help me make sense of my situation(s). In a strange way, this also grounded me because I realized that I had braved a lot of battles by myself at a young age, and I was grateful for *defiant* parents who had raised a *defiant* daughter and given her the strength to face the world independently. Perhaps this is also what Draper (2010)

means in his book *Labyrinth: Illuminating the inner path*: “You will never be the same after such a journey. But you will have become more like you, the real you” (p. 47). I was also grateful that I was in a place like Canada, where I have been able to do a lot of things that might have been *im-possible* in India. Even though back *home* we had the means to live a so-called “*free*” existence, I would still be expected to live like a *good Indian woman* with a husband, or a male member of my family because the Indian society still can/not and does not let women survive on their own. I was always considered a *rebel* in India, and I remember Amma saying *Canada suits you* when I finally went to visit her in 1995, four years after I had immigrated here! I can be my own person here without being like an *appendage* to someone just because I happen to be a woman. Even my (co)participants have talked about how this sense of freedom has made us /them stronger and made them *know* them-selves better.

Be/ing Free

Freedom: can be defined as:

- *the quality or state of being free* (Merriam-Webster dictionary); or
- *exemption from external control, interference, regulation, etc.* (Dictionary.com)

In the hope of de/constructing the stereo-typical image of the *universal* Indian woman I want to talk about the sense of freedom here because every one of my participants brought it up. I think this is because most of us had never lived on our own, or taken any major life decisions until we came to Canada. We all lived with our parents, or in joint families (with inter-generational family members living together), and our parents / *significant others* did everything for us, and they were always there when we needed some guidance. There were *ayahs* (like in

the movie *The Help*) to look after us in our childhoods. A *maid* / *Baai* [बाई] would come home to do the dishes, sweep and wash the floors and do the laundry. If people lived in bungalows, there were gardeners to tend to the gardens and drivers to drive the cars.

As Maya says:

*The first people I missed were the servants
because I had to do the dusting
and learn how to cook,
and then when you buy a house,
you miss the gardener
and you realize what you put them through there.*

As children, we were expected to go to school and study hard, and participate in extra-curricular activities and occasionally help our moms with cooking. I only started working after I finished my M.A. and B.Ed. and even then, I wasn't expected to contribute to the household expenses because my *Pappa* felt that his money was enough to support me / our family. He, like my maternal grand-father – *Ajja*, before him, believed that women should not be working outside their homes. I started to teach only because I questioned him about what he expected me to do with a Masters and a B.Ed., and also because my English professor sent home a letter saying that I should apply to teach in the college. Most of us had never left India or even our homes for that matter, (except for family vacations), before moving to Canada and thus when we came here and we had the freedom to make decisions on our own, it was both a shock and an exhilarating experience.

For **Kanak** it became an existential question because as she pointed out:

*My childhood was very good.
On one side you have this huge void of not knowing the real world*

*no concept of how to make money, or
 how to live
 because you are so used to being taken care of.
 Here you have to make everything yourself.
 That is one lesson you learn here.
 It was basically a shock!
 The sense to do your own thing is a very tough concept.
 I can do whatever I want?
 But I don't know what to do.
 What book should I read?
 Where should we go?
 Yes, it takes a long time to find out who you are,
 and what you want to do with your life
 because when you leave your roots, it shakes you.
 What do I do with my time?
 and what do I want to be?
 What work should I choose?
 and what should I study?
 That is the toughest thing, not anything else
 because you are so used to being taken care of by your family.
 You are dependent like a 2 year old.*

Maya on the other hand said:

*I like the freedom.
 Because there is no family here
 I don't have to live up to be anyone's daughter or daughter-in-law
 I am free!
 Free to go to Carleton,
 free to do what I like
 free to write what I want to write.*

As the oldest daughter from a large family, **Gauri** said:

*For me as a person, I have more freedom here
Because the society doesn't interfere in so many things
I have more independence here for sure.
I don't have too much interference from the extended family.
Back home people like to interfere
they like to have a say in everything
whether it is your immediate
or your extended family.
Here this is my own creation, my space.
Over there it does not happen this way.
Here if your friend says something, you can say
'I don't need your opinion.'
There it is difficult to do this.*

Finding a path/p(l)ace amidst the hy-phens one  at a time

To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's Box.

Who can say what will come flying out?

Behar, 1996, p. 19

According to Hasebe-Ludt et al (2009), post-colonial cultural and literary scholars have taken up métissage as a way to write and survive in these liminal spaces because it has the “potential to become a literacy that transforms both reader and writer” (p. 36). My auto/ethnographical journey is a humble and *concert-ed* (ad)venture, an offering, “a textual polyphony or multivoicedness” (Lather, 2009, p. xi), a métissage of Indo-Canadian women’s silently live(d) ho[me] narratives / stories of their hybrid *currere*. As Kelley (2013) tells us

Truly listening to immigrant stories...requires going beyond the preliminary question of 'Where are you from?' to questions about what it means to belong and be at home in a new country. Such meaningful conversation invites a deeper understanding about belonging and home over the course of time and place...and provides an opportunity to enrich all our lives.

p. 156-157

I have been treading / walking cautiously on my research journey / path keeping in mind the sentiment that "not only is the observer vulnerable, but so too, yet more profoundly are the ones we observe" (Behar, 1996, p.24). I also realize that my quest to highlight the experiences of Indo-Canadian women as they/we find their/our place and ho[me]in this society might have "consequences for [me], the [Storycatcher] /storyteller, as well as for those who read and serve as characters in [my] stories" (Ellis, 2004, p. 124). Yet, I feel that these stories need to be told so that 'others' may understand us and we are able to de/construct the (mis)representations particularly those related to Indo-Canadian girls and women. This is my journey, my "living pedagogy" (Aoki, 2003) – "my *currere* or path of curriculum laid while walking" (Sumara & Davis, 1998) towards an understanding of me/my/self/others and I hope that in some ways it will make a difference in the lives of my participants and the readers. After all this is what autoethnography really is according to Reed-Danahay (1997): "the ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life" (p. 4) because in autoethnographic work, we look at "validity [authenticity] in terms of what happens to readers as well as research participants and the researchers...It evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis, 2004, p. 124).

The Urdu-Hindi poet Gulzar writes:

मुसफिर हूँ यारों | ना घर है न ठिकाना⁶³

मुझे चलते जाना है | बस चलते जाना

Musafir hoon yaaron | Na ghar hai na thikaana

Mujhe chalet jana hai | bas chalet jana

[I am a wayfarer / traveller | I have no home or destination

I just have to keep walking]

Since Canada is said to be a land of i-m-migrants, and given the current social and political environment here and across the globe, I feel that my re/search on ho[me] and not-home, and be/long/ing and be/com/ing in the hy-phens will resonate with anyone who is an I-m-migrant in Canada, or with anyone who thinks of themselves as a visitor / vagabond / so-journer / traveller [यात्री | yatree] / stranger [मुसाफिर | Musafir] / pilgrim / wanderer / refugee / orphan, and one who might have at some point felt lost or home-less⁶⁴. To borrow Rashmi Luther's (2015) words from her Introduction to the book *Resilience & Triumph...* "these stories highlight lives lived in liminal spaces, the spaces in-between –spaces of discovery, strength, resistance, and transformation, spaces in which to be and to belong" (p.5). My friends and colleagues, and even patrons at the library, who are I-m-migrants, or children of immigrants, or refugees have shared (and share) their own, or their parents' ho[me]stories with me, and their stories give me hope and help me make sense of my existential angst of navigating a hyphe-nated currere in the liminal spaces between ho[me] / not-home.

⁶³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCi5kwD1Y8>

⁶⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/2017/becoming-canadian> CBC Canada 2017 is doing a feature on Becoming Canadian "Becoming Canadian is a year-long project sharing stories of struggle and triumph from new Canadian citizens."



Métissage Six: Lingering Steps

*Where this experiment will take us, I do not know,
but I do know that we cannot go back to where we were.*

Richardson, 1994, p. 524

As I do one last sojourn (circumambulation) around the outer edge of labyrinth, I have a final question for my participants:

Q6: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me regarding your experiences of living in Canada?

Roopa

*When I think back,
it was hard.*

*My husband's businesses weren't doing very well
working full time,
trying to raise a family,
at the same time the balance of instilling values and ethics
that I grew up with
and the balance of what is required here in Canada
that was hard.*

But when it was happening,

it needed to be done.

I remember an older woman at work

who was from Europe.

She was much older.

She told me that you have to create a pressure in the house

that will offset the pressure from outside the house.

She says 'negotiate the boundaries but don't change them once negotiated.'

That worked.

It was hard putting the boundaries down because

the children with their friends wanted to re-negotiate all the time.

I was the nasty mom, the bitch, the disciplinarian

because my husband was like one of the children you know

and after a while it was alright with me.

But my daughters who are mothers now say that

'there was no gray area.'

Yes they still complain because

I allowed my son to do something

that they were not allowed to do.

But then again I feel that god was on my side.

That is the only thing I can say

because I did not have children who fought back.

Or maybe because my friend had told me that

the pressure has to be that great.

Food was another one.

They were so limited

people don't believe me anymore.

Literally there were potatoes, rutabagas, green peppers, carrots.

I found that very hard.

My mother would send me care packages from India

That for the first few years was very hard.

Maya

I have drawn on the theme of freedom.
Because there is no family here,
I don't have to live up to be anyone's daughter,
anyone's daughter-in-law,
or anyone's sister.
And so I am free.
Free to go to Carleton,
free to do what I like
Free to write what I want to write.
But had you come
when my husband was out of work,
and I needed the money
and I had no qualifications
and I didn't have the health
and I didn't know why I didn't have the health
and I was struggling
then you would have gotten a different story.
Because that was at that time –
a phase.
Now you are getting a ripened version sort of
because you see,
by this age,
you realize this is how life is.
Its ups and downs and the round-about.
You listen to people and
they may not be immigrants
but they have suffered.
Like the Buddha said there is 'Dukha' (suffering).
So it is a full circle.

*I came as a young mother
ready to conquer Canada
but it conquered me.*

Kanak

*I think I am one of those lucky people
who had a lot of help and good fortune.
My in-laws came after a couple of years
and they stayed with us.
The children grew up with them.
I wanted that.
The children don't know the relationships we have back home.
They still don't understand
why I call everybody aunt and uncle.
It is a very rich [emotional] environment there.
Maybe not now.
I don't know India now
I haven't been there for 4 years and it is changing there too.
But my childhood was very very good.
On one side you have this huge void
of not knowing the real world
No concept of how to make money,
or how to live
because you are so used to be taken care of.
Your happiness, your whole life
is given to you.
Here you have to make everything yourself.
You have to make it happen to be happy
and that is so hard.*

That is one lesson you learn here.
And sometimes people don't have that opportunity to learn
They keep sinking themselves into this negativity
which is sad.
You didn't choose to come here,
but now you are here
now you are grown up
so decide to go back or stay here
and make the best and be happy.
That is my take on that.

Devi

If there is one thing I would talk
about migrating to Canada,
it is Integration
A big hats off to people
for accepting us the way we are.
One thing I would definitely talk
about my Canadian experiences
is how smooth it was.
We came as students
and nowhere did they make me feel like
'what are you doing here?'
I felt they accepted me for who I am
and what I am.
My husband came to do his Masters
and I came a year later
so he knew how things work here
so maybe my transition was a little smoother.

*I never regretted coming here.
 When you know that everybody is a foreigner over here
 that sort of takes away your foreign-ness.
 Knowing English is a definite advantage.*

Padma

*It has been challenging and interesting.
 My husband travels a lot with his job.
 I did not know driving till a few years ago
 so my friends would pick me up.
 Friends here are like family
 I call them my heart family.
 My health has posed some challenges too.
 Also bringing up the children has been challenging.
 It has been interesting to see all the changes in Canada
 How it has grown in all these 30 years
 and how we have established 'us' –
 The Indo-Canadians here in Canada.
 Things are very different now.
 People coming from India know more about this country now
 than we did when we came here.
 But still I would say –
 doesn't matter where you go or where you live,
 don't forget your roots.
 Like I was telling you,
 that you have to believe in yourself
 and be proud of who you are
 and what you are.
 I wanted to teach my children very strongly about that
 because when they started going to school,*

*even if the Canadian society is very educated
and very tolerant to other cultures
and religions and other things,
but still there are few that do not understand.
So the children had to face a lot of comments
And they didn't feel good.*

*"Don't sit beside X, their colour is
so dark it will come on your dress"
"Y is so brown / black, they smell"*

*So I taught my children to be strong
You don't have to change your name,
your identity,
or anything to belong.
You should belong as you are.
So that has come up with the children
and they are out there doing stuff
without hesitating
because they very well belong here.*

Gomati

*We are happy that we are in a Canada.
Ottawa has a close-knit family atmosphere
even a stranger is polite and very amiable.
I have not found that kind of place anywhere
not even in India I would say.
That is my experience.
I tell newcomers that
Ottawa is the best place*

*for anyone who wants to make
a new life in North America.*

Aarya

*Frankly, most of my experiences are good
because I think basically if you take a community,
90% of the people are good people.
There are some people who may have
some type of problems in their mind,
or they think we have problems.
Either way could be true
I don't know.
There will always be people
who cannot get along with someone else
so you just kind of ignore them
and you go on
because you have those other 90%
who are nice to talk to,
to interact with.
So basically what you do is,
you try to create connections with your neighbours,
and with your colleagues
and that is how you create
a small little home for yourself
by creating a network
by trying to bring my children up with good values
so they are well accepted in society as well
and that is how you create home.
You come across all kinds of people,*

*very kind, extremely kind
and some who are not so nice.
So, it is the small kindnesses that make you happy
and that make the other person happy.*

Aparna

*More or less I have told you everything.
I have established myself here.
I mix with the people in the society
because this is such a cold country
and you never know what can happen to you.
That is the reason I go to the temple
even though I don't go [get] along with a lot of their opinions,
I feel this is my community.
I also feel that without God, I can't survive.
I have that much faith.*

Gowri

*First the weather
that was a little difficult.
Language wasn't much of a problem
But the culture,
when it comes to the children,
is a little different here.
Children are on their own most of the time
because I guess both the parents are working.
Back home in those days,
the women stayed at home.*

*But here when we came,
 it was totally different.
 We both had to work
 and children were on their own
 and by the time children are 13
 and they go to high school they are very independent
 Independent in the sense,
 like nobody to question them as such.
 In the evenings, they didn't have to be home
 because the parents were not home
 so that was a little difficult.*

Shreesha

*I did everything in the slow course of time
 like a normal immigrant would probably do.
 You come and you don't know things
 so you start learning.
 I just wish I had children a little later in life.
 I didn't know a lot of people here
 and with no extended family
 I had to do everything.
 I remember
 I must have cried a lot in the hospital
 because I missed my mom
 and I could not bring my parents here at that time.
 It is really sad
 that you give birth in the hospital alone.
 You are in such pain
 but you are just a number*

and they say:
 'go, take a shower!'
 Here you have to get around
 and start doing things.
 But in a way it was good for me
 It made me independent.
 You have to learn to sacrifice something somewhere
 your attachment, your parents,
 your things, your festivals.
 If you can live with minimal of those things
 then you are able to accept things that are here
 and get adjusted to this place much better.
 The other thing is I should have done
 is studied for a Masters degree here.
 I did go to College,
 but it is not the same like having a local degree
 – which is what I should done!

Maanasi

I always felt that Canada is a welcoming country.
 I never felt that I am an immigrant here
 because everybody was so welcoming.
 Of course there are differences as I said
 like I cannot assimilate completely into Canadian culture.
 Still I call Canada my homeland now
 and I am proud of it.
 If there is an India vs Canada match
 we even feel like cheering for Canada!
 One of the challenges is to survive in winter

*Generally during February or March,
at least once,
I feel like 'I should go back to India.'
Also when I compare my office experience in India,
I remember
we used to share food with my friends
so I miss that part.
I am much comfortable in salwar-kameez
so sometimes I feel that I am missing that part
of choosing salwar kameez
or choosing a saree
with different colours
because here you have grey and you have blue
and then you have to choose between grey and blue.
I think that is a challenge.
Also, you need to know driving
if you need flexibility in Canada.
That was one of my challenges which I had to overcome
to learn to drive
and learn to drive in winter conditions
and drive on the highway.*

So-journ/aling: Reflections

*To write is to confront one's demons,
look them in the face and live to write about them*

Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 171

And yet...

*Always just before you pick up the pen, no matter how much you look forward to
writing—or don't—a ball of resistance like a gathering of yarn, coalesces in the
centre of your desire*

Goldberg, 2008, p.267

Like the “*Missing piece*” in Shel Silverstein’s (1976) book, I had set off in search of ho[me] stories of Indo-Canadian women about their diasporic experiences. As I talked to these women, I noticed that most of them had come to Canada in their early 20’s and just like me, they had come to join their husbands. Amongst all of them, Aparna was the only one who had gone through a divorce, yet our *divorce* experiences were very different, and in her situation the fact that she had children complicated matters for her. As I listened to their stories, I wondered why and how the trajectory of my life had been so different even though, for most part, our childhoods were pretty standard for middle-class Indian families. My / our parents had encouraged us to study, and had raised me/us to be strong, independent women and yet, in my case both my husband and later my boyfriend had turned out to be very patriarchal and domineering and had accused me of ‘*being too independent for my own good!*’ They felt they needed to *teach me to be a good (co)dependent Indian woman*, so I rebelled and I left. Even though I had not adhered to the traditional *Indian (Hindu)* ways of living, and had walked out of homes and relationships, I was on this quest to find ho[me] and gather home stories about Indo-Canadian women to understand how they experience their own liminalities in-between home and

not-home. As I *walked* around collecting these ho[me] stories, it was as if through their stories, these women were giving me the strength to go on. Baldwin (2007) says “Story is ours; story belongs equally to every human being. Telling our stories is what saves us, when we add our tiny piece of what we have learned in a lifetime into the great stew pot of collective wisdom” (p.223). I was touched by their responses. Just like every walk on the labyrinth is different, every conversation was different, and even though the quest/ions were the same, the live(d) experiences / stories were unique to each participant. Sometimes, during the interviews, I felt as if they were echoing my experiences. These conversations made me see Ottawa and Canada through different perspectives, and made me realize how much I /we had changed / grown in all these years in Canada. It was very interesting to hear their stories because apart from meeting them during the occasional cultural programs, I had not really talked at length with them about their diasporic experiences. In their article, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) state that this insider status or “complete membership role” gives researchers both a legitimacy as well as a certain amount of stigma, as in terms of “heightened researcher subjectivity” to their research (p. 58). I was grateful that these women had agreed to talk to me and share their experiences with me, but as an insider-outsider I was a little perplexed. All of them were so matter-of-fact about their live(d) / living experiences and most of them threw a very positive light on their immigrant experiences saying that they were lucky to be in Canada. I began to wonder how and why some of my own experiences had been so difficult.

Overwhelmed!
My heart full of stories
of gratitude and strength
of small victories

despite the losses
feeling blessed
yet a little surprised.
How do I re-present
the quiet passion
the poise
the reverence
and sense of pride
for their homes and their families
Leaving me wo(a)ndering
the labyrinth
with complicated emotions.

I was surprised that the participants I had never met before talked very openly, and told me of the many challenges they had faced as they navigated their way in Canada. Whereas, some of the women who knew me and my past, seemed rather reticent to talk about their hardships by saying “*you know how it is!*”, and they seemed more conscious of the one (1)-hour interview time frame and I came away from these interviews feeling as if some things had been left unsaid. I think one of the reasons might be as Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) have explained:

Being a member of a group one is studying...[might mean] that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experiences fully. It is also possible that the researcher’s perceptions might be clouded by his or her own personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants.

On the other hand, Sanger (2003) talks about the issue of *power* in feminist ethnographies:

The interview is imbued with so many different and varied power relations. We ought not to forget that those who participate in interviews often have their own power in the interview process (i.e., the power to refuse to speak, the power to refuse to speak accurately). [Brackets in the original]

p. 33

I pondered on this, and I realize that because I had some ‘insider’ *hear-say* knowledge about their earlier / past lives I felt the interviews lacked some *truth*. They never brought up any sensitive topics that could *implicate their absent / present family members*, and I was torn between what they had told me, and what I *thought* I re-membered / knew. I too was guilty of not telling them everything about me /my-self, or revealing all my stories. I was also aware of the power of the *ethnographic I*. Like Bhattacharya (2008) “I became aware of my complicated positioning as a transnational academic in a higher institution...trying to depict experiences of other transnationals” (p. 85). As I have mentioned before, most of them just answered the questions without turning the research gaze back on me even though this was a mutual exchange / a conversation. “One of the ongoing challenges we face in our writing” write Hasebe_Ludt, et al (2009) “is trying to sort out what is true and what is not...[because] we realize that we are always keeping so much secret” (p.152). When I met these women, I remembered some things I had heard 20 odd years ago, when we were all newcomers to Canada. But I had not seen most of these women in years, and as we all know, our stories, our *realities* and our experiences and how we remember these experiences keep changing, because as Behar (1996) says, “memory...is volatile, slippery” (p. 81) even elusive, and it takes an effort to remember. With a couple of

them, once the recorder was turned off, and we sat down to have tea, I did ask them about their *past* stories and they gave me a few details but mentioned that they didn't want these on record. Most of them also said that they / we are 'older' now and through hope, faith and resilience they had *found* a way / path and *found themselves* and made a life / a home in Canada. Lather (2007) in her book, *Getting Lost* "explores what it might mean to claim getting lost as a methodology for our times" (p.3), and quoting Derrida (2001), she says that one needs to "place hope in the disappointment" in order to "negotiate the mourning and the melancholia" (as cited by Lather, 2007, p.3) because loss can be both "an experience of mourning and promise" (Ibid, as cited by Lather, 2007, p.3). I know that after all these years, I / we have changed in more ways than we could have imagined, and at times because we had nobody else to guide us, Canada has made me / us stronger, more independent (as most of them pointed out) and perhaps our / their stories reflect this new *reality, this new strength*. It could also be as Tamas (2009) says "I have been taught that the right thing to do when confronted with trauma and loss is to recover" –and for this we participate in what she calls as "a *lie of omission* because we like to see ourselves as coherent, knowledgeable and safe...and we have to seem okay even as we describe how far from okay we have been" (Tamas, 2009). Maya was one of my last participants and after her candid and touching interview, I talked to her about this feeling I had about people *lying* to me, or rather not being *truthful* –(*The outsider in me says: who are you to judge?*) –and her wise comment was:

*My experience of being Canadian is
it has humanized me
and got me in touch with my own prejudices.
It has taught me compassion.
Now we have suffered in Canada as immigrants
because you have no Canadian experience*

and your skin colour makes people feel we just got off the boat.
Those things are there
but it is worse in India
so I am glad I live here.
But had you come when
I was struggling
then you would have got a different story
because that was at that time phase.
Now you are getting a ripened version
because you see,
by this age,
you realize
this is how life is,
its ups and downs and the roundabouts.

(Maya's transcript)

After Maya, I met Roopa, my 11th and last participant. Roopa was forthright in her comments and opinions about her experiences at work, about coming to Canada and about life in general. When I mentioned to her about this *lie of omission*, she admitted how in front of people / community she herself puts on a mask of being the dutiful wife, and her retort was:

Is it denial?
Or is it living in la-la-land?
I get it.
I have no qualms.
Maybe if I was in my 30s,
I may not have opened up to many people
because I needed to work it out in my own head.
Also if we acknowledge or verbalize our struggle
it will become real
and they will have to face it.

*It is also a question of immigrant experience
 where a lot of women lead miserable lives.
 Immigrant women, Indian women,
 Italian and Greek women
 put up with a lot here because
 “I’ve been raised and taught to put up with it because he is male”
 I can’t understand it.*

(Roopa’s transcript)

Re/turning to my Roo(u)tes

*Journeys have a way of finding our pathways.
 Whether sought or circumstantial, each journey shapes how we walk in the world*

Meyer, 2009, p. 11



Floor design [Rangoli] made with coloured chalk powders at the University of Hyderabad, for the Women’s World Congress

My search for ho[me] and ho[me] stories led me back *home* –to India, and to Bombay my home-land (जन्मभूमी - *janma-bhumi*), and I was once again inundated / sub-merged by the colours, the memories, the stories, the sounds and the smells, the contrasts and the contradictions of life over there. In spite of all my trepidations –mainly because I had not been back since Amma’s death –and my friends’ warnings to be safe because that was the year of the horrific rape of ‘*India’s daughter*’, I attended the International Women’s World Congress 2014 in Hyderabad, India. It was an interesting and emotional experience for me to re-turn to India as a *non-resident* Indian [NRI] and as an Indo-Canadian *scholar* from the University of Ottawa and to meet the other National and International delegates. It also gave me a tiny glimpse into what my life might have looked like, had I stayed in India where I might have been a *different* Veena! On one hand I felt a twinge of sadness / loss / regret that I have not able to work as a Teacher in Ottawa in a *true* sense, but on the other hand, I have mixed feelings, because living in Canada I have actually experienced freedom and *seen* the world through friends and colleagues from all over the universe. I have also been able to go back to school as a mature student and fulfill a lifelong dream of studying at a *foreign university*!



I got very emotional when it was my turn to present, because I was talking about *living in-between home and not-home* in my home-country, which now felt very e-stranged, and it really dawned on me that I was, and would always be *a child of diaspora* and perpetually in a *Trishanku* state of mind. Visiting *my* childhood home had been more traumatic than I cared to admit because it only brought sad memories and a realization once again that Canada was now ho[me]. My presentation about *living in-between* was well received and it generated a lot of discussion even after the conference via emails, and I got positive feedback from the people who attended my session who talked about the many ways they could relate to it both as insiders (with-in India) as well as outsiders (International or non-resident Indians). One attendee talked about her own hyphe-nated and diasporic experiences once she got married and had to shift to a different city with/in India and how it affected her own sense of I-dentity. Another one said that living in hyphe-nated, liminal spaces is a *gift / blessing* because ‘*one can have the best of both worlds.*’ Might this be the Aokian “Sites of living pedagogy[ies]?” (Aoki, 2004, p. 426) – “Neither this nor that, but this *and* that” David Smith (2003) quoting Ted Aoki (p. xv).

Visiting India after 8 long years, I had a chance to re-connect with some of my family members, my friends and my past colleagues, many of whom I had not met in years. Even though Facebook and other social media platforms have made it easier to keep in touch, there is nothing like meeting some-one in person while enjoying some authentic Indian favourites like the (*home-made*) Bombay street food called *chaat-papdi* and *bhel-puri*. I also realized that even though my parents are now *absent / present*, some of my family members and friends are still there, and I understood what my participants had meant when they said that *home is really where the heart is!* I have to admit, I had been a little skeptical when my participants had mentioned that in spite of living in Canada for a long time, they were able to feel *at home* in India when

they went back for a holiday. Perhaps I had doubted them because I had not re-turned to India since Amma's passing in 2006. When I went back, my Aunt, Uncle and cousins made me feel at home, and for 2 weeks, I did not have to cook or worry about anything. I thought of some things that *Kanak* had mentioned, that as a girl in India, one is clueless because others take care of you – and even now when I was there, I had the same feeling of being like a young girl. I also felt very vulnerable because after all these years away from India, I was *lost* and needed someone to help me navigate my way in my own *forgotten* hometown. When I ventured out on my own, there would be so many *warnings and words of caution* that I started to wonder what had happened to my beautiful Bombay! My childhood friends took time out from their busy schedules to come and meet with me, and drove me around, and the maid / nurse */[The Help]*, or *Baai* [बाई] as we called her, who had looked after Amma during her last days, felt that it was her duty to make sure that my stay in parents' house was comfortable. Thus, it did not matter that things had / have changed, and I / we have changed, I felt that our emotions and feelings were still the same and as an Indo-Canadian *visitor / guest* [अतिथी | Atithee] who has been humbled ('humanized' as *Maya* says) by all her experiences, I was genuinely touched and grateful for all the warmth and love I received. Looking back on this experience, I realize that even though, I have "*carried ho[me] away / with me*" (Bhatt, 1995) to Canada, I have left a part of *me* back there in India. As the saying goes: *You can take a person / girl out of Bombay (or any country), but you can't take Bombay (country) out of the person / girl!* For most i-m-migrants "the challenge is...to understand that [home] is with us all the time, despite how distant or close it might feel" says Kelly (2013, p.120), because after all, "home is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine" (Trinh, 2011, p. 12). Now I wonder if this is what Rilke (1929)

meant when he wrote: “*Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.*” Thus, after returning to Canada, I listened to all the conversations and re-read the interview transcripts with a “wide awakeness” (Greene, 1978) and “wakefulness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in order to glean the essence of their stories.

Stories to live by: living pedagogies

*Story is the song line of a person's life.
We need to sing it and we need someone to hear the singing
Story told, story heard, story written, story read
Create the web of life in words*

Baldwin, 2005, p. 27

The act of writing, and re-writing autobiographical stories guides the writer in an apprenticeship of understanding the meaning of his or her own life

Hasebe-Ludt, et al. 2009, p. 44

I go back to my original existential question of “How do Indo-Canadian women navigate their hybrid *currere* with/in these liminal spaces to create a ho[me]”? Here I use the participants’ words from our conversations and draw upon the notion of *found poetry* again to show how they / we have learned to live in these liminal spaces between home and not-home:

*Immigration is a very freeing experience
One does not have to change totally
You have to believe in yourself
be proud of who you are
and what you are.
You have to put your roots down here
and become strong*

in order to give your children the same kind of strength.

Life is duty, make it a beauty!

Join study circles in the spiritual centres

and discuss with others

who are going through similar kinds of experiences.

Be good to your-self,

your surroundings,

your home,

your family and your community.

We always have to give more than what we take

I try to give whatever I can give

because I know I am contributing to the society

I volunteer at CHEO,

I go to the soup kitchen,

we cook at the temple

go to the street and donate hot pasta.

No matter where you go,

human nature and tendencies are the same.

Maybe this is a richer country

there are people who still have to struggle.

Don't judge

Just help out

I say that to the children too

We don't know what the situation is

'don't judge, do what you can'

I also support charities back home.

Life is duty, make it a beauty!

Work hard

so the next generation is better.

Children are every mother's education

*They are the link I have with the bigger world.
I learned very early on where my son was concerned
that to instill values and ethics that I grew up with
and to balance it with what is required here,
I had to negotiate the boundaries
but not change them once they were negotiated.
I wanted them to excel in life
And this is the only method I know.
These are fundamental values.
It is not Canadian or Indian
these are human values.
Look at all good families.
Here you have to make everything yourself
That is so hard
Life is duty, make it a beauty!
People keep sinking themselves into negativity
which is sad.
Decide to go back or stay here.
Enjoy your life in this new place
Make the best of it.
It is the small kindnesses that make you happy.
Be happy.
If I am happy,
I can make other people happy around me.
There will always be people who cannot get along with you
You just kind of ignore them
And go on.
Create connections with your colleagues
and your neighbours
and this is how you create a home.*

Life is duty, make it a beauty!

Just like with the four women Carol Kelley (2013) interviewed in “*Accidental Immigrants...*” for me and my participants too –

[F]inding belonging and feeling “at home” has come to symbolize the search for an understanding of themselves...a spiritual quest and a metaphor for inward discovery...to look inside themselves. Rather than a place, home became the acceptance of a creative, individual understanding of identity: who they are, who they will become, what they want, and where they belong...What they found along the way has had as much to do with their ability to receive as what has been offered by the places they sojourned.

p. 156

Be/ginn/ings & (un)End/ings (Aadi | आदि – Anant | अनंत)

*How we know and what we know is always within a context of
who we are and where we are.*

Hurren, 2003, p. 120

*The messy text re-creates a social world as a site at which identities and local
cultures are negotiated and given meaning.*

Denzin, 1996, p.225

When I ventured on this journey, I really had no idea what / who to expect. I did not even know if I would get enough participants to tell me their stories. But luckily for me 11 women responded to my call for participation and shared their i-m-migrant experiences. These women made me realize how they too have struggled to find a footing and create a home in Canada. They say people come into your life for a reason and I feel that all these women came into my

life to re-mind me once again of my roots, my *almost-forgotten* cultural stories and to show me how lucky we are to have made it so far in my / our life's journey. I had never met Maya before but we somehow had an instant connection. Perhaps, it was because of our love of reading and literature, or perhaps because of our similar worldviews. Before I could interview her, she interviewed me because she wanted to make sure I would really understand her story. She mentioned in our conversation that she had incorporated Buddhist meditation into her own yoga and spiritual practices, and she asked me if I would like to sit and meditate with her and so we did. Then just as I was about to leave, she told me that as I came up the garden path to her house she had this sudden glimpse of what her daughter might have looked like, had she been alive today. She said that her daughter was a couple of years younger than me and she proceeded to show me a picture of her daughter on her desktop and enquired "doesn't she look just like you?" There I was, staring at a picture of a girl who could have been my sister / cousin with the same kind of hair and features, and she seemed to be around 8 or 9 years old. I just stood there with a lump in my throat, lost for words. In an instant I felt the terrible loss of a mother and remembered how Amma had been when I first came here. In Maya's case, this was an even greater loss – thus we were *united* in our Mother-daughter grief.

I started my auto/ethnographical journey with the story of Dhruva, and as I come to the end of my yatra, I would like to end with this Buddhist parable of a woman named Gautami. Here is Maya's narration:

A young woman, called Gautami comes to Buddha and begs him to revive her dead child. Buddha tells her to go and find a house where no death has occurred and to get a mustard seed from that house to revive her son. Gautami goes from house to house, but in every home there has been a death – someone has lost a father, a

mother, a grand/mother/father, and even a child. Thus a sadder, but wiser Gautami comes back to Buddha realizing that everybody who is born into this world has to die one day – acceptance of mortality. Like the Buddha said, there is sorrow and suffering or Dukkha because we are all mortal beings. Then she becomes one of Buddha's disciples.

Like Gautami, through my research yatra / journey, I have come to realize that almost every person, *i-m-migrant* or otherwise, experiences the same angst and sorrow - *Dukha*. I am back at the entrance of the labyrinth, hands folded in gratitude for this yatra and ready to offer my story-gifts, my literary métissage to the universe. But as Trinh reminds me, these stories are not new: “The story began long ago...it is old...For years we have been passing it on, so that our daughters and granddaughters may continue to pass it on... The story never really begins nor ends, even though there is a beginning and an end to every story, just as there is a beginning and an end to every teller” (p.1). Thus, even though I have come to the end of my re-search journey, this is not the end-ing / conclusion [anta | अंत] of my life-writing because I know that as soon as I meet some-one new, they will ask me “where are you from?” and I will go back into my existential dilemma about home and not-home which most of the time “seems just out of reach, just around the corner” (Smith, 2003, p. xvii) between “a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere” (Trinh, 2011, p. 27). Thus, for me, talking / writing about life / ho[me] will always be “a process of questing, questioning, and sojourning in words and worlds” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 2) because like Trinh (2011), “I am a stranger to myself and a stranger now in a strange land” (p.34).



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Appendix A - Recruitment Text to participants

Hello,

My name is Veena Balsawer. I am a PhD student at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education. I am writing this email to invite you to participate in my research project.

As an Indo-Canadian woman, at times, I feel like “Trishanku,” living / suspended in-between India and Canada. I wonder how many other Indo-Canadian women out there feel the same way and would like to share their experiences with me.

My aim is to gather the experiences of women from the Indo-Canadian community, to understand how immigration influences our lives, and how we learn to live and be/long in these hybrid spaces which are both home and not-home. I am looking for 8-10 Indo-Canadian women participants. The criteria to participate in my project would be that:

- a) As an adult, you made an intentional life decision to move to and/or to live in Canada
- b) You have lived in Ottawa for 20-30 years, and have adopted Ottawa as your home
- c) You have a working knowledge of English since the recruitment text will also only be in English
- d) You still have some connection to India or to your Indian-ness
- e) The most important criteria is that you are willing to share your live(d) experiences with me with the understanding that our conversation “constitutes a portal into knowing oneself and the world better through another” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 206).

Participation will be on a on a first-come, first-served basis. The project is being conducted independently from the organizations and agencies from which participants may be recruited.

Your participation will consist essentially of attending **3 one-hour interview sessions** at a location of your choice. I will ask you some questions in order to generate a conversation about your experiences of immigrating to Canada and creating a home in this country.

Pictures of artifacts: I will ask you to bring in some artifacts such as photographs, or recipe books or music that you treasure as a memory and ask you to talk about these artifacts. With your permission, I will take photographs of these artifacts that you bring to the interview as part of my data collection. These pictures will also be used in future presentations and publications of my study.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The information that you will share with me will remain strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of my research. Your anonymity will be protected in both the collecting and the transcribing of the data by using pseudonyms rather than your actual names. All efforts will be taken to ensure that the pictures I take of your artifacts will in no way identify you as one of the participants. You are under no obligation to share your artifacts if you feel that it might in some ways put limits to your anonymity and confidentiality.

Benefits: This is an opportunity for Indo-Canadian women to express themselves and to share their experiences and knowledge of how they navigate their hyphenated selves. I hope that by talking to other women we will be able to come to a better understanding of how our experiences of living in Ottawa/Canada as adult Indo-Canadian women, have shaped our world views, and how this affects our sense of being, and our existence. I also hope that my study about the experiences of Indo-Canadian women will help to de/construct the image of the “*exotic*” Indian woman, or in other words, de/construct the (mis)representations particularly those related to Indo-Canadian girls and women.

Compensation: As a token of my appreciation for participating in my study, you will receive a gift certificate of \$10.00 to a local grocery store.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed and all recordings will be erased from the recorder.

I have a consent form for you to fill out if you would like to participate in my study.

If you are interested in participating in my study, or if you have any questions, please contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Veena Balsawer

Appendix B - Consent Form

Title of the study: Auto/ethno/graphical métissage of stories in the hyphens: a living pedagogy of Indo-Canadian women's be/com/ing and be/longing

Researcher: Veena Balsawer, PhD candidate, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education.

Thesis / Project Supervisor: Dr. Cynthia Morawski, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education.

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in my research study entitled: “**Auto/ethnographical métissage of ho[me] stories in the hyphens: a living pedagogy of Indo-Canadian women's be/coming and be/longing**” as part of my doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Morawski.

The purpose of this study is to gather the experiences of Indo-Canadian women as we create our homes, our communities, and our identities with/in Canada. I hope to understand how these experiences have shaped our world views, and how this affects our sense of be/longing and be/com/ing in Canada.

Your participation will consist essentially of attending 3 one-hour interview sessions at a location of your choice. I will ask you some questions in order to generate a conversation about your experiences of immigrating to Canada and creating a home in this country. I will ask you to bring in some artifacts such as photographs, or recipe books or music that you treasure as a memory and ask you to talk about it. I will take pictures of these artifacts.

I will record our conversations and also take notes during our conversation. The audio recordings, my notes and the stories about the artifacts will be transcribed and then grouped according to themes that may be recurring throughout the different interviews. I will show you the transcription of our first conversation so that you have a chance to confirm and/or modify it.

Risks: Every effort will be made to ensure that you will not encounter any risk by participating in my study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with. Pseudonyms will be used throughout so that your information will remain strictly confidential.

Benefits: This is an opportunity for Indo-Canadian women to express themselves and to share their experiences and knowledge of how they navigate their hyphe-nated selves. I hope that by talking to other women we will be able to come to a better understanding of how our experiences of living in Ottawa/Canada as adult Indo-Canadian women, have shaped their/our world views, and how this affects their/our sense of be/longing and be/coming. I also hope that my study about the experiences of Indo-Canadian women, will help to de/construct the image of the “*exotic*” Indian woman, or in other words, de/construct the (mis)representations particularly those related to Indo-Canadian girls and women.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The information that you will share with me will remain strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of my research. Your anonymity will be protected in both the collecting and the transcribing of the data by using pseudonyms rather than your actual names.

Conservation of data: The audio recordings, my notes and photographs of your artifacts will be kept for 5 years in a locked cabinet in my office at the University of Ottawa.

Compensation: As a token of my appreciation for participating in my study, you will receive a gift certificate of \$10.00 to a local grocery store.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed and all recordings will be erased from the recorder.

Acceptance: I, _____ agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Veena Balsawer of the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Morawski.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the emails mentioned above.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is yours to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix C - Interview Questions

These open-ended questions will guide me through my complicated conversations with the other Indo-Canadian women. I plan to schedule three interviews with them, each of which will last at least for one hour. These questions are to guide me in my understanding of how they/we create our ho[me]s and our identities, with/in the hyphe-nated spaces that we now in/habit. After the first interview, I will transcribe our conversations and then schedule the second interview where I will show them the transcription to make sure that I have authentically captured their words, their emotions and their sentiments. I will keep this questionnaire handy so that they can discuss other things that might have occurred to them after our previous conversation.

1. “Departure from the homeland and migration to a strange country in order to settle and start a new way of life in a different climate and unfamiliar surroundings is a dramatic step to take” says Helen Ralston (1996, p. v). When did you move to Canada? What was the reason for this move to Canada?
2. Kelley (2013) states, that “feeling like a ‘foreigner’ does not end, instead, as years go by it lingers, creating mixed emotions about belonging, home, and identity” (p.2). What do you think about this statement? What are your experiences of immigrating to Canada?
3. Sometimes I feel like I live in-between or that my life is like “Trishanku”. What does it mean for you to be an Indo-Canadian?
4. “Migration is experienced in relation to home and belonging” How do you define “home?” What are some of your experiences of making a home in Canada?
5. Women are known to preserve things and objects throughout their lives. Are there any memorable objects or things that you treasure and/or cherish? Would you like to tell me about these treasures of yours?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me regarding your experiences of living in Canada?