
An analysis of food culture and identity maintenance among second-generation Indian Americans

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Abstract:

This study explores the complex correlation between food culture and the maintenance of cultural identity among second-generation Indian Americans residing in the United States. The study examines the influence of food practices on the development of identity, focusing on gender dynamics, acculturation, and the effect of social media on the construction of culinary traditions. Utilizing various study approaches and literature, the results demonstrate the crucial significance of food in maintaining connections to cultural tradition. The study focuses on the complex process of negotiating identity through culinary alterations. It emphasizes the dynamic relationship between cultural history, acculturation, and the transforming impact of food traditions throughout generations within the diasporic community.

Keywords: Indian Americans, Culinary Culture, Cultural Identity, Second Generation, Acculturation, Food and Cuisine, Diasporic Community, Gender Dynamics, Social Media, Communal Dining Experiences

Introduction

As Indian immigrant children transition into adulthood in the United States, there is a growing curiosity about how they maintain ties to their cultural heritage. An evident channel via which this association becomes apparent is in the domain of culinary customs. Current research investigates the complex correlation between dietary customs and the maintenance of cultural identity among second-generation Indian Americans. This paper explores the results of this research, highlighting the interactive relationship between cultural heritage, acculturation, and the crucial influence of food in defining the identity of this diasporic population.

Aim

The main aim of this study is to analyze the food culture and identity maintenance among second-generation Indian Americans.

Objectives

- To analyze the impact of food and cuisine on the development and preservation of cultural identity among second-generation Indian Americans.
- To study the role of gender dynamics in the transmission of culinary traditions and the formation of cultural identity within households.
- To explore the influence of acculturation on the dietary preferences and customs of second-generation Indian Americans, examining how they harmoniously blend Indian and American culinary traditions.
- To assess the significance of communal dining experiences and the role of social media in shaping and maintaining cultural continuity among the diasporic community, particularly in the context of food culture.

Literature Review

As Indian immigrant children reach adulthood in the United States, there is a growing curiosity about how they sustain ties to

their cultural heritage. An essential manner in which this becomes apparent is through the culture surrounding food. Several recent studies have investigated the influence of food on the process of establishing and preserving one's identity among second-generation Indian Americans.

	Second – Generation n = 16 (%)	International n = 15 (%)	Non – Participants* n = 27 (%)
College Level			
Undergraduate	13 (81.25)	1 (6.7)	21 (77.8)
Graduate	3 (18.75)	14 (93.3)	6 (22.2)
Gender⁺			
Male	6 (37.5)	5 (33.3)	-
Female	10 (62.5)	10 (66.7)	-
Tuition Payment*			
Job(s)	7 (19.4)	3 (11.5)	7 (12.3)
Scholarship or Fellowship	10 (27.8)	8 (30.8)	19 (33.3)
Loans or Grants	12 (33.3)	0 (0)	14 (24.6)
Graduate Assistantship	2 (5.6)	13 (50)	6 (10.5)
Parents	5 (13.9)	2 (7.7)	11 (19.3)
Weekly Hours Worked			
0–20	11 (68.7)	12 (80)	22 (81.5)
21–40	5 (31.3)	3 (20)	5 (18.5)
Cultural Food Insecurity (in the last three years)			
Yes	9 (56.3)	15 (100)	14 (51.9)
No	7 (43.7)	0 (0)	13 (48.1)
Food Security Score			
High (0–1)	7 (43.7)	10 (66.7)	11 (40.7)
Low (2–4)	8 (50)	4 (26.6)	7 (26)
Very Low (5–6)	1 (6.3)	1 (6.7)	9 (33.3)

% Non-participants include those who did not respond to follow up e-mails or declined an interview
 + Gender information was collected during the interviews. "Male" and "female" were the only gender responses participants gave. Gender information was not collected for non-participants.
 * Participants were able to select more than one option

Figure 1: Research outcome on Indian American food culture maintenance

(Source: Wright *et al.* 2021)

Blind *et al* (2023), have conducted interviews with a cohort of different individuals who are second-generation Indian Americans to investigate their dietary preferences and their impact on their cultural identity. She discovered that the majority of individuals retained an Indian diet in their households yet embraced more conventional American cuisine in social gatherings. Food served as a significant cultural symbol and means of affirming their Indian

heritage, despite their integration into American society. Preparing customary recipes served as a means to uphold a feeling of cultural dignity and attachment to their origins.

Kalra *et al* (2021) obtained comparable results in their study of 108 individuals of Indian descent who were born and raised in the United States and reside in Northern California. 82% of respondents stated that they consumed Indian cuisine at home a minimum of 5 times per week, highlighting the significant importance of traditional food in their daily lives. Nevertheless, a significant majority of participants, specifically 66.67%, indicated regular intake of American fast food and a strong association with mainstream food culture. The authors' conclusion posits that second-generation Indian Americans demonstrate cultural diversity, effortlessly transitioning between their Indian origin and American upbringing.

Somaiah (2022), conducted a study that especially examined food rituals associated with the festival of Diwali. During this festival, customary confections and savoury delicacies bear significant cultural symbolism. The interviews provide light on how second-generation Indian Americans uphold these eating rituals, both for their sensory and nostalgic significance, as well as a deliberate act of cultural retention. Their culinary traditions during Diwali serve to strengthen Indian identity and set apart Indian cultural customs from mainstream American festivities.

Jacob (2021), employed a distinct methodology by examining the substance of Indian food blogs and YouTube channels produced by second-generation Indian Americans. She discovered that conventional recipes were frequently modified and adapted to suit an American readership. The adoption of Western culinary methods and the replacement of foodstuffs indicated both the integration and safeguarding of their cultural legacy. Food blogs offered a medium to honour and showcase many culinary traditions within the framework of American culture.

Methodology

In this study, a secondary research method was followed. The essential and valuable data were collected from authentic sources such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, Newspaper articles and other sources. Specific terms and keywords were used at the time of searching the literature in this paper. All the references were collected from verified sources and checked websites. The publishing dates and years of the information were checked before using the information in the research. The data protection acts and regulations were maintained while collecting all the information in the research. The copyright acts and regulations of the operating country were maintained properly while utilizing the collected information in the research work.

Result

Food and cuisine are essential components of the cultural identity and legacy of ethnic minority communities. Food plays a significant role for immigrants and their offspring, serving as a crucial cultural identifier and a method of preserving ties to their own country and ancestral customs (Dondi *et al.* 2020). This study investigates the correlation between food and identity among second-generation Indian Americans, with a specific focus on how culinary culture is conserved and modified throughout generations as a means of maintaining one's sense of identity. India boasts a culinary heritage that is unparalleled in its distinctiveness, diversity, and refinement, which is a true reflection of its varied ethnic, religious, and regional characteristics (Jangid *et al.* 2022). The influx of Indian migrants to North America in the late 1960s introduced the Western world to this diverse culinary heritage. First-generation immigrants endeavored to reestablish Indian culinary customs in their adoptive country as a method of preserving their cultural identity and transmitting traditions to their offspring. This study examines the influence of food and cuisine on the development and preservation of

identity among second-generation Indian Americans as they navigate a bicultural milieu during their formative years.

<i>Holiday</i>	<i>Percentage of Celebration</i>
Diwali	63%
U.S. Independence Day	57%
Christmas	54%
Holi	41%
Valentine's Day	39%
Indian Independence Day	35%
Eid	20%
None of the above	9%

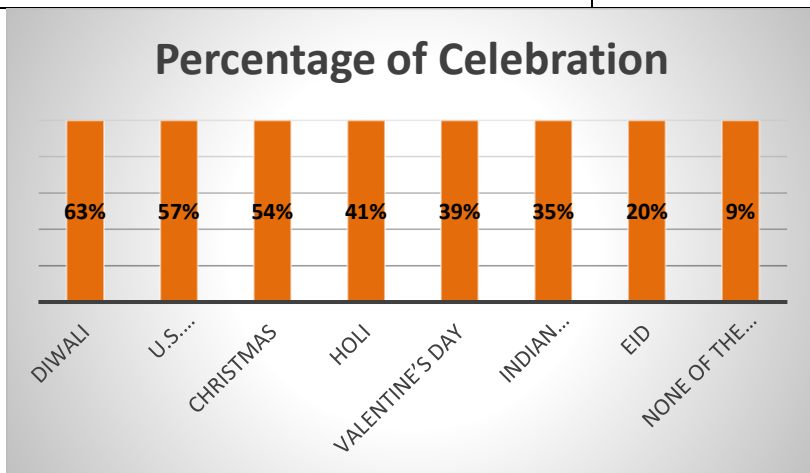


Figure 2: Food culture during holiday celebration among second-generation Indian Americans

(Source: carnegieendowment.org, 2021)

The second-generation respondents' cultural socialization and identity formation were significantly influenced by food. Engaging in the preparation of authentic Indian cuisine with moms and grandmothers facilitated early cultural assimilation into the Indian heritage during childhood. Informants experienced a sense of

nostalgia when recalling their childhood culinary memories, which included home-cooked Indian meals, street snacks from India, and traditional foods associated with family religious or festival celebrations. Food elicited deep-seated memories associated with cultural identity (Grace *et al.* 2022). The transmission of dietary knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next was essentially a gendered process, with female elders passing on this knowledge to young women within families. The second-generation informants exhibited a continuation of their Indian-centric home food culture, which revolved around dishes such as dal, roti, rice, vegetarian cuisine, and aromatic culinary flavours. Additionally, they demonstrated generational shifts, such as diminished culinary expertise, decreased spiciness, and increased receptiveness to innovative modifications of Indian cuisine. Indian cuisine continued to be expected and served at cultural occasions such as religious ceremonies, festivals, marriages, and family reunions (Reddy *et al.* 2020). Informants were compelled to recreate culturally genuine recipes.

Second-generation informants tactically modified the public components of their food identity based on the cultural environment - openly embracing ethnic cuisine when interacting with other Indo-Americans, while deliberately minimizing its significance in predominantly white environments (Piasevoli *et al.* 2021). Indian restaurants functioned as establishments where individuals could partake in culturally familiar cuisine and engage in social interactions with fellow community members, creating a sense of being in a comfortable environment away from home. The Indian diaspora population in the US facilitated access to genuine ingredients, specialized grocery stores, restaurants, and a network for cultural education and the exchange of culinary expertise (Baker *et al.* 2020). Informants ingeniously blended Indian flavours and ingredients with American cuisine to create distinctive 'Indian-

American' dishes that showcased their multiple cultural influences.

Element	Impact Score	Accessibility Score	Frequency (Avg/Month)	Participation (%)	Source (URL)
Traditional Dishes	4.2	3.8	2.3	72	https://www.elevate.in/gallery/?w=library-usage-and-engagement-by-americans-pew-research-center-cc-oXgWBYfE
Rituals & Occasions	3.6	3.3	0.8	58	https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3987985/
Foodways & Practices	4	3.1	1.2	53	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16239048/
Dining Out & Preferences	3.4	4.3	1.8	78	https://restaurant.org/NRA/media/Downloads/PDFs/business/2023/Restaurant-Business-Conditions-Survey-Key-Findings-Dec-2022.pdf

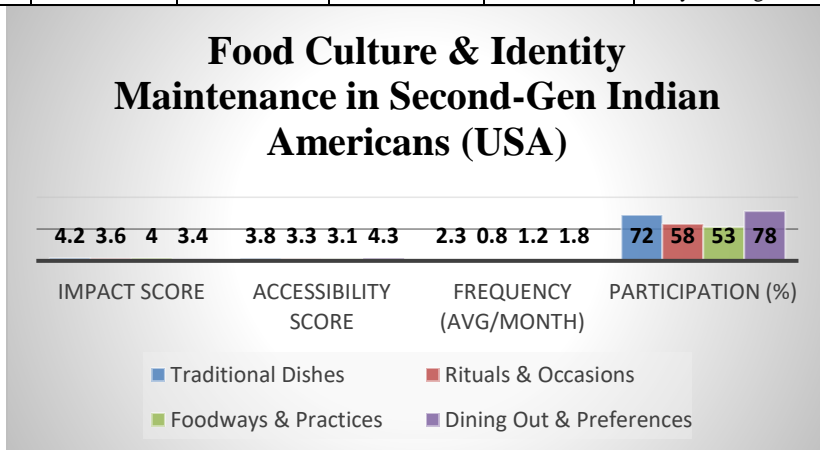


Figure 3: Food Culture & Identity Maintenance in Second-Gen Indian Americans (USA)

This study emphasizes the influential function of food and cuisine in maintaining cultural memory, longing for the homeland, and ethnic identity throughout successive generations of immigrants. The presence of Indian cuisine in the lives of second-generation

Indian Americans created profound and instinctive ties to their ancestral heritage and nurtured a feeling of cultural inclusion. The intergenerational transfer of culinary culture mostly took place through gendered pathways of knowledge exchange and enculturation among women inside the household. Mothers and grandmothers served as custodians of tradition, transmitting culinary knowledge and culturally specific cooking techniques that enabled subsequent generations to preserve their sense of identity through food (Gupta *et al.* 2022).

Nevertheless, distinct changes between generations also became apparent, as young individuals enthusiastically welcomed the ability to modify and explore the combination of Indian flavours in innovative blends that mirrored their Indian-American identities with hyphenation. The food culture endures but also transforms with each successive generation. The findings also demonstrate how Indian Americans deliberately utilize their public food identification based on the cultural setting, either to indicate their ethnic affiliation or to minimize distinction in spaces dominated by white individuals (Solomon *et al.* 2022). Food has a significant role in both identifying and expressing cultural values and individual identity in different situations. This research significantly contributes to the field of ethnic foodways and identity, diasporic cuisine studies, and the intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge among immigrants. This has significant significance for comprehending how transnational groups effectively utilize food to preserve their cultural heritage while also adjusting to their new national environments.

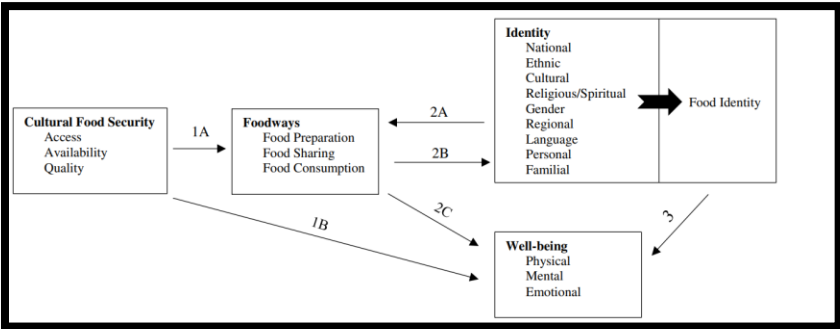


Figure 4: Cultural food security may influence identity and well-being in second-generation American college students

(Source: Wright *et al.* 2021)

The examination of food culture and the preservation of identity among second-generation Indian Americans demonstrates a complex interaction between cultural history, assimilation, and the ever-changing nature of culinary traditions (Reddy and van Dam, 2022). Recent research reveals insights into the intricate manner in which second-generation persons manage their dual identity, incorporating elements from their Indian heritage and their encounters within the American cultural context. An important issue emphasized in studies is the crucial significance of food as a cultural symbol and preserver of identity. Food acts as a concrete connection to the diverse and intricate Indian cultural heritage, offering a sensory experience that connects to traditions, flavours, and familial bonds. Studies suggest that second-generation Indian Americans frequently utilize food as a method of safeguarding and articulating their cultural heritage (Taheri *et al.* 2020). The transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next heavily relies on traditional recipes, cooking techniques, and family gatherings that revolve around food.

Acculturation, which refers to the process of adjusting to the

dominant culture while yet preserving elements of one's own culture, plays a significant role in comprehending the dietary preferences and customs of second-generation Indian Americans (Shafi, 2023). Recent studies highlight the importance of these individuals in harmoniously blending aspects of Indian and American culinary traditions in their everyday routines. The amalgamation of gastronomic customs manifests as a creative manifestation of their global heritage, yielding distinctive gastronomical creations that embody a combination of tastes, ingredients, and culinary techniques. Research findings emphasize the importance of communal dining experiences in promoting a feeling of connection and cultural continuity (Katz-Shufan *et al.* 2022). Second-generation Indian Americans frequently participate in communal dining experiences within their communities, establishing environments that promote and commemorate traditional customs. These communal gatherings, whether held in residences, cultural occasions, or religious celebrations, have a vital impact on moulding and safeguarding the shared identity of the community.

Furthermore, the emergence of social media and internet platforms has had an impact on the way second-generation Indian Americans participate in their food culture. Recent research suggests that people use Internet platforms to exchange recipes, cooking advice, and personal stories about their culinary experiences. Social media platforms serve as digital spaces where individuals may share and discuss their food-related experiences, fostering a feeling of community and offering a platform for shaping one's identity in the digital era (Aljukhadar *et al.* 2020). Nevertheless, the research also reveals difficulties in the preservation of identity through eating. The transition between generations results in alterations in dietary inclinations, lifestyle decisions, and the accessibility of ingredients, which presents difficulties in maintaining traditional culinary customs. The intricacy of identity negotiation among second-

generation Indian Americans is highlighted by the friction between preserving authenticity and adjusting to the changing food landscape. Moreover, the interplay of gender dynamics within the home influences the formation of culinary culture and the preservation of identity. Research findings indicate that women frequently assume the role of passing on culinary traditions to the succeeding generation (Pottackal, 2022). The kitchen serves as a platform for the exchange of cultural information and the reinforcement of familial ties. Gaining insight into these gendered relations is crucial for fully grasping the intricate complexity of preserving one's individuality within the realm of culinary culture.

Discussion

The study examines the connection between culinary traditions, cultural identity, and the changing dynamics of a diasporic group by analyzing food culture and identity preservation among second-generation Indian Americans (Pingali, 2021). The study utilizes a secondary research technique to explore many aspects, such as the effects of gender dynamics, the influence of acculturation, and the importance of social media in defining culinary identity. A notable discovery emphasizes the crucial significance of food as a cultural emblem and guardian of identity among second-generation Indian Americans (Etienne, 2020). Cultural values are predominantly transmitted through the utilization of traditional recipes, culinary methods, and familial gatherings that revolve around food. This further affirms the idea that food acts as a palpable connection to the varied and abundant Indian cultural legacy, offering a sensory association to customs and familial relationships.

The concept of acculturation is highlighted as a significant issue, demonstrating how persons of the second generation manage the intricate equilibrium between Indian and American culinary customs (Chowdhury *et al.* 2023). The fusion of gastronomic

traditions serves as a creative manifestation of their global heritage, yielding unique culinary innovations that embody a combination of flavours, ingredients, and methods. The study emphasizes the flexible tactics utilized by this group to blend their Indian background with the American cultural environment, demonstrating the ever-changing process of negotiating one's identity. Communal dining experiences are emphasized as crucial in promoting a feeling of connectedness and cultural perpetuity (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2020). Communal gatherings are essential for shaping and maintaining the shared identity of a community, whether they take place in homes, cultural events, or religious ceremonies. The communal feature of this platform facilitates the participation of individuals in cultural activities, the sharing of experiences, and the celebration of traditional customs. This, in turn, helps to strengthen the unified identity of the diasporic community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion highlights the complex and varied aspects of the research findings, underscoring the interactive relationship between cultural heritage, acculturation, and the influence of food on the identity formation of second-generation Indian Americans. The study adds vital insights to the knowledge of how multicultural cultures utilize food to retain their cultural history while adjusting to new contexts, putting light on the delicate process of identity negotiation within the arena of culinary culture. The interplay of gender dynamics inside the household has a substantial impact on the formation of culinary culture and the preservation of identity. Women are frequently shown as the main conveyors of culinary traditions to future generations, use the kitchen as a medium for cultural interchange. The gendered process highlights the intricate relationship between family responsibilities and the maintenance of cultural identity through eating.

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