

DESPERATELY CRAVING INDIAN FOOD: INDIAN RESTAURANTS, CULTURAL
COMMODIFICATION, AND DIASPORIC BELONGING IN DALLAS FORT WORTH

Veda Yagnik

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Dr. Indrani Chatterjee

College of Liberal Arts, History

Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Caroline Faria

College of Liberal Arts, Geography

Second Reader

ABSTRACT

Author: Veda Yagnik

Title: Desperately Craving Indian Food: Indian Restaurants, Cultural Commodification, and Diasporic Belonging in Dallas Fort Worth

Supervising Professors: Dr. Indrani Chatterjee, Dr. Caroline Faria

In this study, I engage with the question what are the functions of Indian restaurants and their food in the South Asian diaspora? In my work, I consider Indian restaurants as cultural-economic sites, operating on the edge of South Asian communities in that they are accessed by both South Asians and non-South Asians. Subsequently, restaurant spaces create a dialogue through food that evokes questions of cultural commodification, socio-cultural hierarchies, and authenticity in recreation. For this study, I chose to blend elements of a rapid ethnography and case study methodologies to qualitatively analyze selected restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex. By studying restaurants holistically, I critically analyze the creation of value in Indian restaurants by examining the restaurant model of six Indian restaurants owned and operated by three restauranteurs. In the following sections, I conduct an intensive literature review of sources related to the South Asian Diaspora, Food Studies, Cultural Reproduction and Belonging, and Management Studies. Following this, I expand on my usage of the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment methodology and my sources of study, including a description of the restaurant sites and restauranteurs included in this study. The final section is a robust discussion of the study findings, attained through a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary research approach. This section explores the role of Indian restaurants while considering the nuanced realities of food, people, and place in the DFW Metroplex. The purpose of this study is to better understand 1) the function of Indian restaurants as cultural landmarks and 2) the operations of Indian restaurants as centers of production.

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INTRODUCTION

As a child, I unquestioningly ate all the *Dal Bhat*, *Khichdi*, and *Sabzis* that my mother put in front of me. But when I entered my teenage years, I began a war with Indian food. By the time I was sixteen, my mother would be lucky if I ate even one meal of *Bhakri*, *Shak* with the rest of the family. I blame my feud with Indian food on the unwillingness of my taste buds to fully adapt to the spices used in most of my mother's recipes. Even in this phase of food rebellion, I loved going out to Indian restaurants, and there was no shortage of Indian restaurants in Dallas Fort Worth. Whether it was an organized dinner with other families at a Punjabi restaurant on Friday night, a spontaneous lunch at a *Dosa* restaurant after visiting the temple on Sunday, or a quick snack of *Pani Puri* from the Subzi Mandi Grocery Store's Chaat Cafe, I apparently craved all forms of Indian food except that which my talented chef-mother made for me.

As I enter adulthood, my relationship with Indian food continues to take on new forms. Moving away from home has given Indian food new meaning. Since moving to Austin, I have not eaten at an Indian restaurant once, but the first meal my mother cooks for me when I visit home is *Pav Bhaji*. She knows, as I do, that I spend most of my mealtimes away from home thinking about Indian food, so much so that during freshman year finals week I tweeted "desperately craving Indian food, please send help." Ironically, independence has guided me back home. Even today, eating Indian food is a practice of restoration that is rooted in home, nostalgia, and connection.

I often minimize my relationship with Indian food to something contained to the home and experienced in the meals cooked by my mother and shared by our family and our Indian friends. Too often, I forget that my happiest memories of Indian food are set in restaurants. My re-acceptance of Indian food was heavily influenced by these memories where my cravings for

Indian food were satisfied by mild dishes and savory snacks. Most importantly, because we rarely ate at Indian restaurants without another family or group of families, my time in these restaurants was spent surrounded by friends who felt like family.

I share these experiences as a means of exhibiting that the relationship between Indians and Indian food in the United States is complex. My experiences are not universal, but they underscore the shared emotions and memories that connect a body of people who crave pieces of home. For Indians, cultural and historical identity in the United States has been tethered to an unbounded collection of South Asian diasporas. For South Asians living in the United States food functions as a relevant cultural, economic, communal, and political organizer. It mediates acceptance and difference between American society and South Asian communities by bringing people together as a part of a diasporic body in ways that were not possible in the homeland. Indian food in the United States, for better and for worse, can overcome certain differences in nation, religion, class, caste, and religion.

This project observes food as a diasporic subject, meaning that foods perceived or labeled as being “Indian” are not necessarily tethered to one particular nation. Food from South Asia is carried out of the region by people who then retain, recreate, or innovate new and old recipes using available ingredients. By imagining food as diasporic subject, it can be treated as something that changes in relation to people and place. This study focuses on Indian restaurants, whose presence in the United States can be traced back over 100 years, and the conditions that allow Indian food to survive, change, and thrive in an American food landscape. Restaurants have long operated first, as sites of commerce and capital, and second, as sites for gathering and belonging, where communities are brought together through shared space and meals. Critically thinking about the public domain of ethnic food enterprises, allows us to connect food to the

migration of peoples to the United States. Food then becomes part of a larger process of cultural production and reproduction. In a country where food is attached to notions of societal acceptance, belonging, and conversely, otherness and not-belonging, the consumption of ethnic foods exacerbate the realities of South Asian cultural and economic belonging in the United States.

In this study, I engage with the question *what are the functions of Indian restaurants and their food in the South Asian diaspora?* In my work, I consider Indian restaurants as cultural-economic sites, operating on the edge of South Asian communities in that they are accessed by both South Asians and non-South Asians. For this study, I chose to blend elements of a rapid ethnography and case study methodologies to qualitatively analyze selected restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex. By studying restaurants holistically, I critically analyze the creation of value in Indian restaurants by examining the restaurant model of six Indian restaurants owned and operated by three restauranteurs.

In the following sections, I conduct an intensive literature review of sources related to the South Asian Diaspora, Food Studies, Cultural Reproduction and Belonging, and Management Studies. Following this, I expand on my usage of the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment methodology and my sources of study, including a description of the restaurant sites and restauranteurs included in this study. The final section is a discussion of the study findings, attained through a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary research approach. This section explores the role of Indian restaurants while considering the nuanced realities of food, people, and place in the DFW Metroplex. The purpose of this study is to better understand 1) the function of Indian restaurants as cultural landmarks and 2) the operations of Indian restaurants as centers of production.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To study food as it is created, commodified, and remembered brings together the stories of people – stories that go far beyond the plate, or even the kitchen. For Indian food, which has traveled thousands and thousands of miles from all parts of South Asia into the kitchens of houses and restaurants across the world, the food is intricately linked to the movements of the diaspora so that we cannot conceive of Indian food in the United States without first identifying the South Asian diaspora. When speaking of Indian food in the United States and England, I will often connect it to the South Asian diaspora as an acknowledgment of the ways in which “Indian food” in these countries is often used to describe foods originating from all parts of South Asia. It is essential to respectfully acknowledge the differences between South Asian cuisines and to remember that foods from the region differ by nation, region, class, religion, caste (where applicable), and household. In spite of these vast differences of food practices, foods from South Asia have historically been labeled as being “Indian” by American markets and consumers. Further, South Asian restaurants were present in the United States before decolonization and Partition occurred in South Asia. These restaurants, owned by Bengali, Sinhalese, and Punjabi men of different religious and class backgrounds, were gathering spaces for South Asians in the early 20th century and were homogenously perceived as being “Indian” in spite of any differences in cuisine and ownership. While restaurants and consumers have recently begun to somewhat distinguish between the cuisines of South Asia, “Indian food” in American foodways is not always geographically confined to foods from the Indian nation.

In the following literature review, I first consider the American food landscape as being actively shaped by the food traditions of historical and current migrant groups. I then focus on the patterns of cultural retention, exchange, and assimilation present in South Asian migrants to

better understand what differentiates public facing food practices from those in the private sphere. Doing so allows me to evaluate how outward facing food sites, specifically restaurants, have served both the South Asian community and a more expansive American market. Through this literature review, I engage with food studies, South Asian diasporic, Management, and American studies scholars to understand what economic and cultural survival means for South Asian Americans in the 21st century through Indian restaurants.

American Tastes: Eating the *Other*

Donna Gabaccia, author of *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* writes about the American food palette being built through the foodways of immigrant communities, their religious traditions, and their processes of cultural accommodation and resistance.ⁱ Gabaccia's work is foundational and presents itself as a history of the foods that make up American identity. The role of the *other* in building something we perceive today as being whole-heartedly and authentically American builds an argument that immigrant cultures have always been an integral part of American-ness. Food, which disguises itself as a more acceptable version of cultural acceptance than say marriage, again asks the question of what food and the decisions attributed to food (what to eat, how to cook) say about community identity. In response to this, I would engage with Donna Gabaccia's definitions of the American food palette as a "melting pot" or "mestizo nation."

Still, these notions of *acceptability* are not substitutable for *belonging* because of a reliance on forms of exoticism or fetishization of the *other*. This is especially traceable when determining what kinds of foods are considered "ethnic" versus American. While in large part, mass-produced foods typically lose their ethnic identities in the United States, the exceptions are foods that continue to hold their ethnic association even as they become popularized and

perceived as “quintessentially American.” It is in this context that immigrant restaurateurs and ethnic food enterprises find their market niche.

As Krishnendu Ray discusses in “The Immigrant Restaurateur and the American City: Taste, Toil, and the Politics of Inhabitation,” so-called “ethnic” restaurant entrepreneurs (restaurateurs) do not necessarily view their establishments as cultural entities but rather as entities for commerce.ⁱⁱ The commodification of ethnic foods either through grocery stores or restaurants has historically served two purposes. The first of which is creating an in-ward-facing community space where familiarity and homeland connection can be recreated through goods and human interaction. The second role of these businesses is to provide economic sustenance for owners by creating value that sometimes requires reaching beyond the internal community – to outsiders such as other immigrant communities, tourists, and non-immigrant Americans.

The tactics used by immigrant restaurant owners to attract and retain customers creates commercial value for the ethnic foods being sold. Thomas Bailey writes about the managerial styles, market position, and means of financing that differentiate immigrant-owned restaurants from all other segments of the restaurant.ⁱⁱⁱ Though, in addition to these factors, visibility, respectability and critical mass appear to restrict the entrance of certain cultural commodities into the American mainstream. The American food market exhibits the imbalances in conditions of success through the historical and ongoing positioning of ethnic foods in the ethnic restaurant industry. For instance, the differences between say French restaurants and Chinese restaurants can be seen across price, customer base, decoration, and geographic location, with Chinese restaurants, historically, occupying a lower hierarchical position in its reviews, ratings, and pricing. Generally speaking, the gaps between Asian cuisines and European cuisines parallels the history of exclusion of Asian Americans in the United States.

In the United States, Indians are differentially situated, geographically, and socially — most often defined as a group by their selection to enter the United States after 1965 as a professional labor supply. Still, less than half of the Indian American population arrived before 2000, and the recent emergence of an Indian population defined by class and professional status has clustered not just in city centers but suburban, metropolitan areas such as Raleigh, North Carolina, and the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, Texas. In these domains, Indians have established different conditions for the Indian American food landscape and its relationship to the community than other immigrant groups discussed in many American-immigrant food ethnographies whose communal formation is discussed as a part of an urban ethnic economy. Before understanding the relationship between South Asian and American foodways, we must first explore the historical movements of South Asians into the United States.

An Introduction to South Asians in the United States

Though it may be remembered as beginning after the British entered the region through the East India Company in the mid-eighteenth century, migration has been a rudimentary part of South Asian religious traditions, political hierarchies, and economic lifestyle. From Brahmin scribal scholars who moved within the Mughal empire to seafaring traders who moved between Asia, Africa, and Europe, migration precedes the construction of the modern nation-state and its borders. The histories of peoples moving into, across, and out of the region has created multi-layered collections of people in different parts of the world. South Asian migration to the United States centers around early Bengali Peddlers in the American South, Punjabi Farmers in the West, and Seamen and political revolutionaries in the Northeast. However, the migratory movements of South Asians to the United States increased exponentially after the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965. The Act put a premium on professionally educated immigrants like

doctors, engineers, and scientists; these “early movers” who arrived immediately after 1965 totaled to about 12,000 Indians. A second wave was made up of the so-called “family cohort” arriving during the 1980s totals to roughly 30,000 relatives who reunited with their families. The third wave of immigrants followed the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act, which allowed for more “guest workers” who received H-1B temporary work visas. Professionally educated Indians, predominantly those in “the IT generation” received 56 percent of the 129,000 H-1B visas granted in 2011.^{iv} From 1980 to 2013, the Indian immigrant population in the U.S. increased from 206,000 to 2.04 million, doubling every decade.

Their numbers in turn made their cultural identities an especially significant aspect of the urban landscapes in the USA. In all these cities, Indian immigrants were politically and socially minoritized. This experience called forth what Shaolu Yu identifies as a “thirdspace” – an alternative and parallel system of care, community, and survival based on community networks.^v Yu argues that the imaginative geography of the thirdspace is the “space of inbetweeness, of marginalization, and of being.” For diasporic subjects, or communities who identity with something beyond a socially constructed nation, these thirdspaces are expressions of solidarity in which sociability can be found in that which is familiar. Examples of this include cultural organizations, religious centers, and communal spaces like grocery stores or restaurants. This thesis studies some of the sites in this 'thirdspace' that pertain to the provisioning, delivering, and consuming of Indian food.

Pass the Plate: Analyzing the Relationship Between Public and Private Sphere Foodways

South Asians in the United States pre and post 1965 have organized themselves around a myriad of identities such as national, religious, linguist, professional, gender, and sexual identity. In an effort to recognize these differences, my work considers the movements of South Asian

peoples and cultures as belonging to a larger South Asian diaspora. Food in particular serves as a vessel for understanding something much larger than itself as it is intertwined with notions of acceptance, authenticity, and identification. Food has become the bearer of such gendered, religious, class, national, and ethnic identities.

Jayanta Sengupta writes about the relevance and practice of food in retaining a sense of South Asian identity throughout the diasporic movement, particularly in the United States and Britain. Food in diasporic subjecthood has been a powerful tool for re-affirming cultural identity, building collective identities in “foreign” places, and “performing assimilation.”^{vi} Migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka since 1965 have created particularly vibrant food-centered microenvironments in particular North American cities, such as the Queens neighborhood in New York and Edison in New Jersey. This is because South Asian immigrants bring culturally specific food-based practices that effect not just the private life of the immigrant family, but the American communities in which they settled.

However, such foodways are sharply divided between public and private spheres and are gendered in ways that allow immigrants to simultaneously acclimate to their surrounding societies and stand apart from them. In *The Immigrant Kitchen: Food, Ethnicity, and Diaspora*, Vivian Nun Halloran ingeniously distinguishes between the private and public food life of immigrants, defining eating as performance for national belonging.^{vii} This is apparent too in the relationship between gender and food for Indian immigrants.

The division of public and private American life is reflected in the public and private foodways incorporated into South Asian American life. Cooking and eating in the home (categorized as domestic or private life foodways) have been cultural forms preserved predominantly by women who carry the burden of retaining and recreating cultural practices in

the homeland as well as in the diaspora. Meanwhile, the outward-facing food identity of Indians encompasses enterprises such as restaurants, grocery stores, and cookbooks.

The latter has become especially loaded as a site for the 'performance' of diasporic identity. Uma Narayan argues that commercialized “Indian food” and its association with an “Indian culture” or an “Indian way of life” reinforces the way in which certain practices are “seen as vital to cultural authenticity and preservation” while other norms can “yield to adaption of change.”^{viii} The process of determining what cultural practices are amendable is inherently gendered, as women are often the maintainers of culture and identity in the household of Indian families abroad. Religion, too, is an underlying factor in determining homeland and migrant foodways whether it be through diet and lifestyle, food preparation, sites of consumption, or eating. Chitrita Banerji in writing about the customs and rituals of everyday Bengali life in food^{ix} emphasizes how religion and gender actively (and passively) shape the public and private activities of South Asians abroad. In diasporic communities, religious and national belonging are ultimately negotiated through food in a way that is gendered.

Halloran introduces the key term “gastronomic surveillance” which “refers to the observation and policing of a person’s eating habits to ensure conformity with an assumed norm, whether by parents or by peer groups.” Halloran argues that especially for immigrants living outside of the social safety net of an existing social-ethnic community (such as an enclave), eating in public is how immigrant families “negotiate their otherness.” This is separate from Gabaccia’s argument that immigrants are able to be affirmed in and retain their cultural conservatism in city centers like New York City with large, established ethnic communities. Notions of cultural authenticity, utilized to determine in-group and out-group boundaries, are enabled through gastronomic surveillance where members of a cultural group are able to

gatekeep belonging. Therefore, perceived authenticity is tethered to the belonging and identification of the diasporic subject.

Movindri Reddy, who writes about Indian women and Indian foodways in South Africa, too, suggests that food shapes the formation of South Asian communities outside of the homeland. By allowing for an Indianness that is adaptable but still identifiable, Indian women sustain and reproduce diasporic communities “through cultural innovations.”^x Reddy builds on the expectation of “authenticity” within diasporic communities, by exemplifying the ways in which South Africa-Indian women utilize food – recipes, cooking, and taste – as a means of policing “Indian-ness.” By socially gatekeeping South Asian foodways, divisions of class, religion, race, etc. are exacerbated under the guise of a homogenous Indian identity. The practice of policing Indian food, is repeated throughout the diaspora, though differently executed in the private and public sphere. Ultimately, food cannot be separated from religion or gender, as both have a direct influence on the economic and cultural activities of immigrant communities.

American Tastes: Analyzing the Place of Indian Food in American Restaurant Landscapes

The positioning of Indian restaurants in the United States exposes the separation between private and public food traditions as the types of food served in these restaurants, and perceived by Americans as fundamentally “Indian,” are notably different from the foods eaten in immigrant households. We see this in the popularization of “curry” and naan “bread” which across the United States has been universally accepted as Indian food in spite of many households not consuming these dishes in the home. Like Jayanta Sengupta’s argument that Indian food in the diaspora is not representative of the food eaten in the homeland nor is it represented through the food served in restaurants or identified by non-Indians (and Indians) as “Indian,” Gabaccia highlights the ways in which immigrant food entrepreneurs, especially in New York, adapt their

homeland foods to a new market and changing tastes of their consumers. Innovation amongst immigrant “inventors” allowed for the creation of new foods, new norms, and new food identities.

For Indian foods, it is important to consider the manufacturing of Indian food culture in Britain through what has been called the “tandoor” or “tikka” or “curry” revolution. The emergence of a produced, homogenized Indian food in Britain was then sold back to India as “Indian culture” thus permanently attaching British national identity to a food culture presented to the world as traditionally “Indian.” Ravi Arvind Palat superbly details this history by contrasting the rhetoric around Indian food in Britain as a metaphor for supposed cultural hegemony against the realities of marginalization and fetishization of Indian food in the British palette.^{xi}

In its near three hundred years in Britain, Indian food has become a 4.1 billion Euro industry, with estimates suggesting that 2.5 million customers eat at Indian restaurants every week. As suggested by Sengupta, though this normalization has not been duplicated in the United States, it is undeniable that the British presentation of Indian identity has subconsciously influenced the exoticism and homogenization of Indian culture in the American public conscious. When paired with the comparatively lower levels of South Asian migration to the United States pre-1965, these conditions uniquely situated Indian restaurants as out-ward serving “ethnic” restaurants that catered to non-Indian consumers. In comparison to Britain, whose modern history is inextricably linked to South Asia, it is understandable why the country’s food history mirrors its relationship with South Asia.

The first Indian restaurant with Indian management in the United States appeared in New York City in 1913 (Ceylon Restaurant) and 1918 (Taj Mahal Hindu restaurant).^{xii} As Krishnendu

Ray analyzes in dissecting the names, menus, and management of the first Indian restaurants in New York City, Indian restaurateurs clearly differentiate between the food cultures they present through their enterprise and the food cultures that are practiced domestically. This difference, as predicted by Narayan and Palat, is certainly gendered but also appears to be related to the perception of restaurant foods purely as an economic commodity, completely devoid cultural value. Ray and Palat engage with this question of what the performance of Indian-ness actually means from a cultural and economic perspective by writing about South Asian Bangladeshi and Pakistani owners of so-called “Indian” restaurants.

Palat explains historical and ongoing self-identification of Bangladeshi and Pakistani restaurants as “Indian.” A Bangladeshi restaurateur told Palat that consumers typically associated “Indian” foods with “the romance of the exotic” whereas, “Bangladesh is a land associated with floods and cyclones.” Further Palat says that the association of Pakistan and Bangladesh with militant Islam and attitudes of Islamophobia “has made it unattractive to name restaurants after that country.” This pattern reveals divisions within the South Asian diaspora related to acceptability, dominant cultures, and competition for consumer tastes. Palat provides the example of the emergence of the Guild of Bangladeshi Restaurateurs in competition with the Elite Indian Restaurant Association. While Indian restaurants and Indian food in the restaurant industry Orientalizes Indian-ness to American and European consumers, its introduction, production, and consumption is tethered to a more complicated understanding of the relationship between belonging, power, and hegemony within the South Asian diaspora.^{xiii}

Ultimately, Indian restaurants are forms of economic sustenance for Indians in the United States. For early South Asian immigrants arriving pre-1965, food enterprises were a way for Indians to enter the American business landscape as enterprise owners. This opportunity

presented itself as a means to build something, provide a livelihood, employ family members, and send remittances to family back home. Indian and other Immigrant restauranteurs founded their enterprises by accessing capital through communal ties (because they did not have traditional access points to loans and other financing enjoyed by white and non-immigrant restaurant owners).

What began as enterprises to financially sustain migrants became cornerstones of community — spaces for commonality, gathering, and neighborhood. Vivek Bald, in exploring the lesser-known migratory narratives of South Asian seamen, academics, and political revolutionaries, identifies Indian restaurants as the site of activity within the South Asian community. Organizing amongst South Asians belonging to political organizations such as the Friends of Freedom for India took place at restaurant sites where nationalist solidarities were built between Indian elites and sailors as well as Irish nationals and American liberals.^{xiv} Similarly, the Bengal Garden, opened by Habib and Victoria Ullah in 1946, catered to a combination of South Asian and non-South Asian customers and was an established meeting place for Bengali Muslims who in 1947 formed The Pakistan League of America.^{xv} These histories tell us that transnationalism and non-national community building along the lines of class, religion, and race have always been connected to restaurant enterprises.

In the last decade, there have been structural, industry-wide changes in the positioning of Indian restaurants. Indian restaurants have retained their importance in sustaining South Asian community formation. Especially as the South Asian population increases, there is a renewed present and visible consumer market for Indian and newly emerging, non-Indian South Asian enterprises to serve. Accompanying these population changes is an increasing willingness of non-South Asians to eat at Indian restaurants. The consumption of identifiably ethnic foods has

exponentially expanded the Indian food industry in markets such as New York and New Jersey so much so that non-Indian South Asian restaurants have begun to reshape the industry as a whole. The explosion of the “ethnic food” market, denoted by the search for “authenticity”, in the latter half of the 20th century, has now created space for a restaurant scene unrecognizable to immigrant-owned restaurants in the 19th or 20th centuries.

The movement of South Asian goods, peoples, and practices into the United States has led to restaurants and foodways serving as outward-facing sites of performance that have shaped American cuisine and tastes. Alongside whole meals and dishes, the influence of Indian food on the United States is tasted in the spices and cooking techniques that have become essential to American food culture, though, often, in the process, they have been stripped of their Indian origins. Examples of this include spices such as Black Pepper and Turmeric as well as popularized food trends such as “Ayurvedic cooking” for detoxification. Lisa Heldke defines this domain of interaction ‘food colonialism,’ a term that describes everything from the romanticization of so-called “ethnic” foods in the United States to the co-optation and erasure of ethnicity from foods in the United States.^{xvi} The “globalization” of the palette has allowed for segmentation in the ethnic restaurant industry along several axes. It is typical, now, to see restaurants differentiate by attributing their techniques, recipes, and cuisines to various regions in South Asia,^{xvii} as opposed to ambiguously identifying with a nondescript “North” or “South” Indian cuisine. Further, Indian restaurants are now geographically located in suburban and metropolitan areas.

The differences between Rasika, an upscale restaurant in Washington D.C. where President Obama celebrated his birthday in 2017, and Taj Chaat House, located in the back of a Taj Grocers in Plano Texas, represent the range of the Indian restaurant industry. Differentiation

across price, location, and most importantly customer base has guided the entrance of Indian food into the American food landscape. Of course, the distinction between the restaurant industry and other spaces of food consumption has created different standards of acceptance for Indian food which cannot be ignored. Especially within the question of “authenticity” which is asked by both Indians and non-Indians in public and private eating spaces, restaurant eating can perhaps be viewed as a performance of cultural belonging or cultural acceptance.

Food is Life: The Necessity of Food in the Practice of Remembrance and Recreation

To discuss the role of food in the formation of diasporic identity and community, first, requires an acknowledgment of the critical relationship between food and memory. Though this body of research does not directly engage with the psychological and historical frameworks of collective memory, it is necessary to consider food as remembrance. For some Indian Americans food is a recreation of a place that they know – or that they once knew. There is a personal, complex relationship between food cultures amongst immigrants in the United States and memory that has been explored through academic and public communal forms of scholarship.

Wong Hong Seun’s essay in *Food and Foodways in Asia*, titled “A Taste of the Past: Historically Themed Restaurants and Social Memory in Singapore”^{xviii} pulls from the work of Maurice Halbwachs, whose writings on collective memory theorizes how groups of people remember the past and even ground their individual memory in the context of collective memory. Hong Seun positions food sites, particularly restaurants, as sites of memory that then trigger collective acts of remembrance. Here, food can be materially and emotionally charged artifacts whose smells, tastes, textures, and visuals ground immigrants navigating a volatile, unknown environment. Especially in diasporic or migrant communities where tradition is not

engrained in everyday life, Hong Seun notes that artifacts, traditions, and practices are used to engage in remembrance.

The construction of place and livelihood are dependent on memory and identity. Lidia Marte and Brian Stross, authors of “Migrant Seasonings Food Practices, Cultural Memory, and Narratives of ‘Home’ Among Dominican Communities in New York City”^{xi} produced an ethnographical case study that both observes and celebrates food landscapes of Dominican Migrants by capturing the imperfect but necessary usage of food by migrants to reproduce ‘home.’ By presenting food “as time capsules to re-member the ruptures of displacements,”^{xx} food landscapes in the present becomes a multi-dimensional reconstruction of the past that tethers itself to physical cultural sites in the present.

Marte and Stross, in their work, utilize similar frameworks to Shaolu Yu’s work on Chinese American’s sense of place in Flushing, New York City.^{xxi} Together, these scholars capture the delicate balance between memory and imagination that facilitate the recreation of home in immigrant communities in the United States. To live as an immigrant in the United States is to live a life filled with everyday resistance. These resistances – to cultural hegemony, to patriarchal norms, to whiteness and racialization – can be exercised through cooking and practicing food traditions. Cooking requires a combination of emotional labor and memory-work, that we must acknowledge as being gendered.

As with Narayan’s writings, Marte and Stross, underscore the choice-making that woman, as cooks in the home, experience in the liberatory setting of the kitchen. Beyond the scope of Marte and Stross’ study, which focuses on first-generation migrants, food can be explored as a bridge between the shortcomings of memory and the generational ruptures within immigrant families.

Food, as experienced in my own life, has been a part of the recreation of home for all generations – even those whose connection to the so-called homeland is less absolute.

In its capturing of the yearning or in-betweenness experienced by a diasporic subject, food memory is a key component of collective memory. Together, Hong Seun's and Marte and Stross' work examine foodways – both the physical landscapes they build and the histories they pull from – respectively through collective memory and place memory. Within their frameworks, food memory is non-linear and sporadic but is rooted in community and place. Food is not just the thing that is preserved in an individual's memory but is also the thing that invites remembrance through the reactivation of memory. Such remembrance indicates that perhaps Indians eating at Indian restaurants are seeking our sociability and connection.

Cravings, Comfort, and Community: Evaluating the Function of Indian Restaurants for Indians and non-Indians

Anuja Balasubramanian and Hetal Jannu founded “Show Me the Curry” – a multimedia digital anthology on food – in 2007 to create recipes, share traditions, and facilitate cultural recreation through videos and recipes with an expansive online community of millions of YouTube viewers and hundreds of thousands of blog followers. Their logo was “traditional recipes for a modern woman,” and they served an audience that consisted, largely, of new Indian moms looking to cook at home for their families, older women who were tired of their own cooking and wanted something new, and newlyweds seeking to impress spouses.

In speaking to Anuja Balasubramanian, I came to understand the function of Indian foodways in the United States, particularly in the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex, to be rooted in memory. For Balasubramanian, food traditions do not need to be perfectly conserved. In India, recipe collection is not standardized. Though dishes and cuisines are regional, the preparation of foods

varies from household to household. Recipes are perfected from generation to generation and carried on in practice – cultural memory – that then accounts for differences in tastes from home to home and even from generation to generation. To second-generation family members food, perhaps, occupies a different function. With differences in cultural norms and food landscapes in the United States, there might be less of an emphasis to center home life around food which leads to generational fissures in food remembrance. Balasubramanian believes that there will be a loss of recipes with second-generation cooking, but that loss can be a “wonderfully great evolution.”^{xxii}

In the United States, differences in family and regional foodways are exacerbated in a population where Indian immigrants, coming from all across the subcontinent, are less than two percent of the total population. Indian American communities, therefore, are not always built on the basis of shared regional heritage, and instead, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-regional communities are abundant. Food, it seems, bridges many of these inter-generational, socio-cultural differences, especially in restaurant spaces where bigger groups, noisy children, and diverse palettes are accommodated, perhaps because restaurants themselves are a melting pot of cuisines. As opposed to home-style cooking which is highly personalized to family palettes and preferences. In this way, and because of the distinct ways that food is passed down and recreated in the family unit, restaurants can offer some element of novelty to the palette.

Balasubramanian’s theory as to the complicated and even restrictive function of Indian restaurants to Indian American communities, particularly in the Dallas Fort-Worth (DFW) metroplex, is specific to the kinds of Indian Americans that reside in the suburbs of the metroplex. For the Indians who left India in the 1980s and 1990s and settled in DFW, the India

that they left behind is the India that they preserve in their minds. Indian restaurants, which began to expand in the 2000s and 2010s sought to recreate the country they remember.

What attracts Indians to restaurants is perhaps partly nostalgic and rooted in memory, something that newer restaurants struggle with mimicking. The immense power of these historical restaurants comes from their ability to rely on collective memories, shared by restaurant owners, cooks, and customers, as well as an intensified, nostalgic sense of loss to allow for recollection at the food site. Using this, one might understand why even with the recent, rapid diversification of the Indian restaurant landscape in the Dallas-Fort-Worth Metroplex to include fusion food dining and high-end luxury dining, there is a lingering hesitancy of Indian Americans to shift their dining habits away from the sites of remembrance that they have claimed already.

Finally, in theorizing the value of Indian restaurants as intra-community sites of remembrance, I would like to reassert that cultural restaurants, where Indian families and communities gather not just to gather as a self-identified or identifiable group, act as sites of cultural performance and gastronomic surveillance. Paul A. Bramadat defines “cultural spectacles”^{xxiii} as organized events where groups are able to represent themselves to its own members and non-members. These events are critical in forming and maintaining group identity by allowing groups to control the ways they are presented and perceived. Though Bramadat limits the definition of cultural spectacles to organized, extravagant events, I would argue that Indian restaurants as food sites of memory, familiarity, and identification, re-create a sense of place that Indians Americans choose to publicly identify with. In considering them simultaneous and unbound markers of cultural recreation as well as group performance, I believe we can begin to better understand the complex function of eating establishments.

Assessing the Gaps in the Literature

The literature on Indian food is abundant but appears to cluster around Indian foods and spices in the homeland, the production of Indian food in England, and the first Indian restaurants in the United States. The former focuses predominantly on food's relationship to South Asian histories and regional diversities and continuities in food while the latter focuses on New York City pre-1965 and immediately after 1965. Additionally, the scholarship on immigrant-owned restaurants and American food identity is non-specific and either lumps immigrant and ethnic restaurants together or charts a history of cultural cuisines that do not include Indian tastes.

There appears to be a focus on certain regional cuisines, "ethnic" cuisines, or religious cuisines that largely focus on immigrant populations that obtained critical mass in the United States – such as Jewish Americans, African Americans (as a group enslaved and forcibly brought to the United States), and Chinese Americans. These groups were influential in developing the American food industry and consumer palette that influences tastes today, but by honing in on certain populations in the United States there seems to be a lack of discussion around the complex ways that immigrant groups and colonial food traditions that do not have a visible American population have shaped American foodways and food preferences. Additionally, with a focus on food history prior to and immediately after the Immigration Act of 1965, literature does not address how the changing landscape of incoming immigrants, expanding immigrant cultures, a broadening consumer preference in the United States continue to expand foodways.

South Asian diasporic literature acknowledges that Indian food cannot be viewed as binary – it cannot be viewed simply as Indian or not. I would argue that mainstream America, though, defines food as either be quintessentially American or not, and that which is not American retains its cultural, ethnic, or religious marker. This leads to eaters seeking out

“authentic” ethnic experiences that draw on expectations for or fantasies about ethnic groups. Though Gabaccia lays the foundation for re-defining American foodways as malleable and historically shaped by the *others* the reality is that for certain immigrant groups, their identity in the United States is inseparable from the public representations of their foodways. For Indian Americans, this contrast can be noticed through the differences in restaurants that perform Indian food and the Indian food consumed in Indian households.

The disconnect between research conducted in management studies, food studies, and South Asian diasporic literature is emphasized by the separate recognitions of food as separate cultural and economic commodities. Within the fields of management studies, where ethnic restaurants are often evaluated only to determine customer responsiveness to authenticity, there is a lack of discussion about the placement of Indian restaurants against a larger background of immigration patterns, assimilation and resistance, and community formation.

In a society where we are what we eat, the treatment of food purely as a commodity hinders us from using Indian food as a means to understand social and economic belonging and acceptance. By studying Indian American food as a diasporic subject – something that must respond to displacement – food itself can be liberated from the binary created by belonging to Indianness or Americanness. It can simply be, and as such be used to build an investigation of its imperfect relationship to community building and retention to the homeland that is rooted in the realities of an American consumer market.

In this study, I engage with the question *what are the functions of Indian restaurants and their food in the South Asian diaspora?* In my work, I consider Indian restaurants as cultural-economic sites, operating on the edge of South Asian communities in that they are accessed by both South Asians and non-South Asians. Subsequently, restaurant spaces create a dialogue

through food that evokes questions of cultural commodification, socio-cultural hierarchies, and “authenticity” in recreation. For this study, I chose to blend elements of a rapid ethnography and case study methodologies to qualitatively analyze selected restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex. By studying restaurants holistically, I critically analyze the creation of value in Indian restaurants by examining the restaurant model of six Indian restaurants owned and operated by three restaurateurs.

SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

Overview

In the United States, there has always been more to food than the food itself. Food is intimately and intricately connected to people and place – a vital part of the formation of physical communal spaces that guides intra- and inter-community interactions. For diasporic subjects, food becomes an integral, generational artifact for remembrance, celebration, and kinship. Food, as a diasporic subject itself, responds to changes in social landscapes and acts as a mechanism through which one can display belonging or otherness through cooking and eating. The collapse of South Asian food into infinite food traditions defined by national, regional, religious, and cultural boundaries is, to an extent, unexplored in the greater American public food domain. By this I mean participants in public foodscapes, namely restaurants and grocery stores, in the United States, often use "Indian food" as an all-encompassing category to describe the different foods of South Asia.

This phenomenon of the homogenization of South Asia minimizes discourses on cultural boundaries, recreation, and commodification within (and of) diasporic communities. Within the United States, there is a recognized distinction between the South Asian foods recreated in private and public domains. These gaps, when studied, tell us about belonging, authenticity, and mobility of South Asians within our communities and also with the larger American public. Restaurants, as public-facing food enterprises, rely on the commodification of food. In my work, I consider Indian restaurants as cultural-economic sites, operating on the edge of South Asian communities in that they are accessed by both South Asians and non-South Asians. Subsequently, restaurant spaces create a dialogue through food that evokes questions of cultural commodification, socio-cultural hierarchies, and authenticity in recreation.

For this study, I chose to blend elements of a rapid ethnography (also referred to as “mini-ethnographies” and “quick and dirty ethnographies”) and case study methodologies to qualitatively analyze selected restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex. The purpose of this study is to better understand 1) the function of Indian restaurants as cultural landmarks and 2) the operations of Indian restaurants as centers of production. This was accomplished by focusing on the internal processes of production and procurement as well as the external processes of food consumption and customer interaction in competitive, successful food enterprises in the metroplex.

While the study’s data collection does not focus on technical financial elements such as funding, the adoption of quantitative management frameworks – which include industry analysis, competitive advantage, and value chain analysis – were supplemented by rapid ethnographical elements such as benefactor/stakeholder interviews with cultural experts and group insiders, intensive methods of data collection such as photos and audio recording, and short-term site visits. Traditionally, so-called “ethnic” restaurants have been studied either through a sociological lens – as cultural units – or through a business lens – as production centers. More recently, there has been an emergence of scholarship that connects some socio-cultural elements of restaurants to the financial or managerial components of their model.

However, there are few to no works that identify such restaurants as sites of food production which are inherently designed as both cultural vestiges and profit-driven business units. Restaurant owners, as the creators of these units, are at the center of my research, for their knowledge on the interconnectedness between culture and business informs their strategic decision making. Further, restaurateurs carry with them extensive field knowledge that combines their lived experiences with technical business expertise. The multi-faceted, interdisciplinary

approach used for this study, explores the role of Indian restaurants while considering the nuanced realities of food, people, and place in the DFW Metroplex

Rapid Ethnographic Assessment

A rapid ethnographic assessment (REA)^{xxiv} is a form of ethnographic study that recognizes that cultures and subcultures are not geographically restricted to what is elsewhere. Rather, cultures and subcultures can be studied by people who are close to them and have some degree of commonality or shared experience with the participants. A focused ethnography can be especially valuable in fragmented fields of study and also is responsive to the realities of compressed timelines and limited resources within the research process. Most importantly, REA is immensely beneficial when there is a need to involve the community in participatory research.

A rapid ethnography is differentiated from a traditional ethnography by 1) the presence of a research question before entering the field 2) short term or absent field visits 3) a researcher with a more personal or “insider” relationship with the cultural group 4) intensive data collection through recording, transcripts, photographs, literature reviews, and collaboration with community members. The purpose of an REA is to document and gather information that can then be used to supplement what is already known with new insights. Its findings and methodology can then be considered in informing future research and policy. When planning, conducting, and writing an REA it is necessary to be realistic about the shortcomings, usability, and value of its findings.

Regarding methodology, REA consists of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviewing, ethnographic mapping, direct and participant observation, and sometimes brief surveys all of which seek to “elicit insight and description” as opposed to measuring frequency or magnitude.^{xxv} Managerial case study analysis methods, which in many ways are similar to the

REA, rely on detailed and robust analysis of the internal structure of a business unit through data collection, interviews, and company history which are framed through particular management concepts and theories. In recognizing the similarities between the two, I developed a research process that adapts managerial case study analysis into a rapid ethnography and allowed me to study internal and external business features within qualitative, sociological measures that build on existing food studies and restaurant studies knowledge and center the knowledge of South Asian restaurant owners and their customers.

My methodology had several components beginning with an extensive literature review. In my review, I pulled from two key sources. My first source was academic, scholarly work on the South Asian diaspora, food studies, and so-called ethnic restaurants. From there, I collected information on Indian food within the Indian American community from forms of public scholarship – most notably, non-academic Asian food writers, food influencers, and food community centers. These non-traditional food scholars were critical sources of information to understand the realities of not just cooking Indian food in the United States, but of the political and social dynamics of food cuisines in American tastes.

During this process, I met several times with the two food personalities, Hetal Jannu and Anuja Balasubramaniam, who founded "Show Me the Curry," a virtual food platform consisting of cooking videos and recipes that now has several million viewers across the globe. My findings left me with a multitude of questions surrounding the necessity of Indian restaurants and their food as cultural, commodified artifacts within and beyond the Indian American community. I then used my preliminary research questions to sequentially design my study using a rapid ethnography assessment that consists of three key elements – "insider" interviews with

restaurateurs, observational short time site visits,¹ and mapping. Businesses were chosen strategically with consideration of their industry position (determined through factors such as price, location, food style, business growth, and relevance within the DFW). The process of selecting the enterprises utilized for this study is expanded upon later in this section.

My in-depth interviews were conducted with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). As such, interview questions were prepared several months in advance of the interviews following the initial literature analysis and were reviewed by community stakeholders. The intimacy of the one-on-one interview allowed participants to share their experiences with discretion and a low-pressure environment. Questions were intentionally open-ended, non-specific, and vague so as to give control to participants over the information they shared and the narrative concerning their food and their restaurant. Follow-up questions were individualized and responded to the details provided by interviewees. Interviews were recorded and a copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. Further, participants were given the option of having their names and business names left anonymous. Finally, all participants were emailed copies of their transcripts and sections of writing that concerned their businesses for consent.

In addition to these “insider” interviews, each restaurant site was visited twice, once for an interview with the owner during non-business hours, and again for a three-hour ethnographic

¹ In accordance with the standard procedure for Rapid Ethnographic Assessment, the primary knowledge source within this study is the perspective of the “insider.” REA practices suggest collecting information by focusing on action. In centering the perspective of such insiders, whose relationships to the research question are localized, collected information is detailed and culturally rich.

observation² where observational field notes were taken. Within this component of the research, restaurant sites were observed to consider factors such as the flow of people, the process of ordering, the process of eating, the process of serving and interacting with customers, the scope of customers, and restaurant features. The following themes were used to organize data:

Physical Place and Operational Flow which considers factors such as geographic location, neighborhood, interior, and exterior space, mapping of floorplan (which can be found in Appendix 3), seating options, ordering process, and service.

Brand Identity and Food Subjecthood which considers factors such as built environment, naming, interior, and exterior decor, menu design, descriptions of food, plate ware, how food is served, utensils, and availability of alcoholic beverages.

People who include customers as well as staff. Subjects are observed to understand demographics, group behaviors, ordering patterns, eating mannerisms, and overall flow through restaurants as well as server demographics, service patterns, and interaction with customers.

Field notes are attached in Appendix 3. Restaurant owners were informed in advance of site visits, and full consent was given for ethnographies to be conducted on-site. In alignment with REA procedure, the researcher actively participated in the setting – sitting in the space, ordering food, and interacting with employees. It should be noted that due to COVID-19 communication with customers and employees was limited beyond ordering and service for the safety of both the researcher and participants. Finally, site locations were mapped during the study. The interior of each restaurant was mapped, by hand. Mappings can be found in Appendix 3.

² Ethnographic observation, according to REA procedure, helps to illustrate or document activities, places, or behaviors germane to the research. Observation can be done at any point in the research and requires observing and interacting with people as they engage in activities.

Defining Location (Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex) and Population

Because rapid ethnography assessments emphasize the inclusion of diverse sources – from research team members to community participants – that can serve as content experts as well as “cultural experts.” As a researcher, my status as a member of the DFW’s Indian-American community guided my outreach by enabling me to connect with content and cultural experts. To justly conduct the study with a population, food, and geographic landscape that I had a robust understanding of, I chose to focus my research on the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex. DFW is a metropolitan area that encompasses thirteen counties in north Texas: Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, and Wise.

In 2019 the estimated population of the metro area was 7,573,136 with a median age of approximately 35. Demographically, 7% of people in the DFW metroplex identify as Asian, 16% identify as Black, 29% identify as Hispanic, and 45% identify as White. While there are over 200 towns and cities within the metro area, the population is most concentrated within four counties – Dallas, Tarrant, Denton, and Collin. Within these four counties, there is a visible, growing Asian American community, especially in Collin and Dallas County where the non-Hispanic Asian population is projected to grow to more than 500,000 by 2030, accounting for greater than 20% and 15-19.9% of the population, respectively. The total Asian population in Dallas, Tarrant, Denton, and Collin County, according to the 2010 census, is 331,542.

My family has resided in the metroplex since 2001, and I have been a resident of Collin County for 20 years. As such, my familiarity with the spatial and social organization with the overall metroplex enabled me to approach my study knowing the realities of the subcultures I was seeking to understand as well as the unique conditions that define parts of Indian-ness

throughout DFW. Dallas-Fort Worth has always been particularly interesting because of the massive size of the metroplex and the spatial accessibility of the metroplex to individuals with cars.³ Travel to different parts of the metro, as well as the presence of multiple city centers and community centers, enables movement across cities to be as regular as movement within a city. In addition, the projected non-white racial growth in the four central counties would support the already culturally rich ethnic enclaves present throughout DFW.

According to the Pew Research Center, the Indian population in the United States in 2019 was 4,606,000. The percentage of Indian immigrants that have lived in the United States for more than 10 years has increased to 57% meaning that there are more Indians who have resided in the United States for longer. This can be seen in the critical mass of Indians in certain parts of the United States – most notably Texas and California. In the Dallas Fort-Worth metroplex, there is a concentrated Indian-American population that has been rapidly expanding. From 2000 to 2010, the number of Indians in North Texas (specifically in Collin, Dallas, Denton, Rockwall, and Tarrant counties) more than doubled from 49,181 to 106,964. The shift towards more established and permanent Indian American communities within the United States is reflected in

³ Nostikasari, Dian. "Representations of Everyday Travel Experiences: Case Study of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area." *Transport Policy* 44 (2015): 96–107. Access to transportation is a key component of social mobility within Dallas-Fort Worth. Vulnerable and lower-income minority populations across DFW have decreased mobility because their built environment, especially in Dallas counties inner-city neighborhoods, limits ability as well as choice in travel. There is an abundance of scholarship and study in DFW that critiques the metroplex's disparate investment into transportation networks. Notably, Plano, located in Collin County, is a higher income area of the metroplex that has been found to more strategically position retail and commercial centers closer to highways and major road intersections which makes shopping, eating, and grocery shopping more accessible. Finally, DFW has been cited as creating the illusion of mobility, particularly in Dallas, because the assumption utilized in the transportation modeling process is that travelers always have access to a car. Nostikasari, Dian.

the visibility of Indian-American youth. The median age of Indians born in the United States is 13, as compared to the median age of Asians born in the United States being 34.

The cultural landscape of the metroplex has adopted the religious institutions, communal spaces, and enterprises needed to support the diverse South Asian populations concentrated throughout its cities and suburbs. It should be emphasized that Dallas Fort Worth's South Asian population includes more than just South Asian Indians. In 2019, the Dallas metropolitan area had the largest population of Nepalese in the United States (15,000),^{xxvi} the fifth largest population of Pakistanis (25,000),^{xxvii} the fourth-largest population of Sri Lankans (2,000),^{xxviii} and the seventh-largest population of Bangladeshis (7,000).^{xxix} In 2015, Dallas-Fort Worth had the ninth-highest population of Bhutanese, many of whom are resettled, refugees.

The South Asian community in DFW is more than just its Indian population. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial community made up of people practicing different religions, celebrating different cultures, working in different industries, and eating different foods. While Indians make up the largest percentage of South Asians in the metroplex, it is critical to consider the presence of other South Asian ethnic communities on the development of food landscapes. Historically, Indian food has served as a catch-all term for food from across the subcontinent as well as food from other South Asian countries. While Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Pakistani, Bhutanese, and Indian foods share some similarities, they are vastly different from one another.

Migrants from these countries carry their food traditions with them in the same ways that Indian migrants do, and the recreation of recipes and cooking traditions is a part of the cultural retention that brings communities together. However, for non-Indian South Asians, the incorporation of their food traditions in the public foodscape has been slower. There are far fewer Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese restaurants in DFW than

Indian restaurants with many Indian restaurants being owned by Pakistani or Bangladeshi restaurateurs.

Indian Restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth

When considering the historical context of the Indian restaurant landscape of Dallas-Fort Worth there was a limited written history to pull from. In speaking to long-term Indian-American residents of the DFW community, one of whom was Show Me the Curry co-founder, Hetal Jannu, the origins of Indian restaurants in the metroplex ambiguously surrounded several first-movers. The same few restaurants – Hare Krishna (which refers to the Hare Krishna temple in which the all-vegetarian restaurant Kalachandji's is located), Kebab and Curry (which is now closed), and India Palace. These three restaurants were founded in the 1970s and early 1980s and are remembered throughout the community as some of the first establishments to serve Indian food in DFW.

Pardeep Sharma, co-founder and owner of Kebab and Curry and India Palace, identified the 1980s and 1990s as the periods in which Indian cuisine began to slowly expand throughout the metroplex. Since then, there have been hundreds of Indian restaurants that have appeared all across the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The extent to which Indian cuisine has become a valued presence in the metroplex's food landscape is best captured by a published article in D-Magazine's May 2017 issue by Eve Hill Agnus which features all types of Indian restaurants, broken down by the regional cuisine served by each establishment.^{xxx} The article walks readers through different states in India from Kerala and Tami Nadu to Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab, and lists accompanying restaurants that serve the localized cuisines of each state.

Eaters in the DFW area have come to understand Indian food in a way that supersedes the conventionally broad breakdown of Indian food into North vs. South. The restaurant landscape

present in Dallas-Fort Worth not only includes localized, regional foods but also vibrant and innovative fusion cuisines like Indian-Chinese and French Chinese. In addition to the more conventional brick-and-mortar restaurant front, there is a collection of in-house eateries attached to South Asian grocery stores as well as active shops and kitchens in Hindu and Sikh temples and Mosques. Finally, there is a network of ghost kitchens and private chefs that accept and fulfill orders for families, singles, and young college students seeking home-cooked Indian food.

Restaurateur Selection Process & Biographies

While this study focused on brick-and-mortar restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, it is relevant to consider the existence and influence of different food enterprises in the public domain beyond restaurant units. The process of choosing restaurateurs to interview and study was done through the rapid ethnographic assessment framework, and thus required consideration of the spatial history, social capital, and community engagement of restaurants and their owners. Restaurateurs were selected based on the orientation of their enterprises within the Indian restaurant industry. Years of operation, location, price range, food preparation, and structural layout were all considered factors.

The intention in choosing three differently oriented restaurants was to have a breadth of Indian restaurants that catered to different dining styles and observe the differences in business operation, customer profile, and internal organization. Dually, each enterprise had a vastly different origin story that centered around entrepreneurs whose backgrounds presented non-homogenous narratives about the origins of their products. Finally, industry experience was examined in the selection process with the goal of interviewing restaurateurs who could operate as “cultural experts” as well as “insiders” to incorporate experience-based, technical knowledge about the ins and outs of the Indian restaurant industry in DFW.

The participants included in the study were all contacted first through email. Individuals were then contacted via text message, email, or phone call to set up a one-hour interview time on-site. Following the interview, which was recorded and transcribed, enterprises operated by each restaurateur were visited for a 2 to 3-hour active ethnographic observation. These visits were conducted with the consent of owners and adhered to REA guidelines. Business owners were consulted to coordinate the site visit hours that corresponded best with customer traffic through the restaurant and the positioning of a restaurant. For instance, Roti Grill Dallas – which was designed to create a fast-casual Indian eatery for businessmen and individuals on the go in downtown Dallas – was visited from the hours of 11:30 AM to 2 PM.

Brief biographies of each restaurateur and their enterprises have been included below.

Participants consented to their names and business names being included in the study.

Happy Singh and his wife, *Mona Singh*, are the co-founders and co-owners of *Urban Tadka* – an acclaimed Punjabi restaurant serving traditional, homestyle Punjabi meals at two locations in Irving (located in Dallas County) and Flower Mound (located in Denton County). Happy Singh was born in the state of Punjab, and after graduating from the Indian Institute of Technology, and in 2000, after working in India for several years, he came to the United States on an H-1 Visa. Throughout his two years working in the technology industry, Happy Singh, a self-proclaimed foodie, spent his free time in the kitchen practicing old family recipes and developing new recipes. In 2010 he began to informally practice cooking on the weekends with a retired chef, and upon receiving his green card in 2013 he opened *Urban Tadka* with his wife *Mona Singh*. At the time, there was a gap in Dallas Fort Worth's Indian restaurant industry — there were no restaurants exclusively serving Indian-Punjabi food. Specifically, the recipes that Happy and *Mona Singh* ate at home in Punjab, which they now cooked in their Flower Mound home for themselves and their children, were not present in the public Indian food landscape. They filled this gap in the market by developing a restaurant concept that combined their traditional, homestyle recipes and the new recipes that Happy Singh had been experimenting with (which were largely developed from Punjab-style cooking and recipes). Since 2013, *Urban Tadka* converted a diverse customer base of white-collar workers and South Asian families into regular diners at their Irving location. The success of their first enterprise led to the opening of the second restaurant in Flower Mound in

2017.⁴ Urban Tadka was one of five South Asian restaurants to be included in the Dallas Observer's "Top 100 Dallas Restaurants" list for 2021 and in 2020 was awarded the title "Best Indian Restaurant" in Dallas by the Dallas Observer. For this study, Urban Tadka Irving was visited on July 25th from 6:15 PM -8:30 PM.

Pardeep Sharma is one of the earliest movers in the Indian restaurant industry in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. He migrated to the United States in the 1980s from New Delhi, and after studying hotel management in New York, moved to Dallas after receiving a business proposal to help launch an Indian restaurant in Downtown Dallas. His first restaurant concept, Kebab and Curry was started in the early 1980s in Richardson (located in Dallas and Collin Counties) which closed in 1989. His second restaurant concept, India Palace, has been open since 1989 in Dallas and offers a fine-dining experience to American and Indian customers. In 2000, Mr. Sharma opened his third restaurant concept, Roti Grill, which was a fast-casual eatery located in the center of downtown Dallas. With its success, he later opened a second location in Frisco (located in Collin County). In 2016, Mr. Singh also opened Lita's Mexican Grill in partnership with another Dallas restaurateur which serves modern recreations of Tex-Mex with Indian elements and flavors in Plano (located in Collin County). Mr. Singh's most recent concept is a fusion, contemporary take on Indian naan wraps located as an eatery in Legacy Hall Food court (located in Collin County). Pardeep Sharma is one of the most established Indian restaurant owners in Texas, and his expertise is attributed to the role he played in constructing the landscape for Indian restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth. India Palace, especially, was continually referenced in the conversations I had with other restaurant owners and community members about the history of Indian food in the DFW's public domain. For this study Roti Grill Dallas was visited on Tuesday, July 27th from 11:30 AM - 2 PM; Roti Grill Frisco was visited on July 28th from 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM; India Palace was visited on July 29th from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM.

Sabrina Nayeb is the co-owner and co-founder of *Âme*, one of the newest additions to the metroplex's Indian food scene. Ms. Nayeb launched *Âme* in 2021 with her mother, Afifa Nayeb, a trained chef through Le Cordon Bleu, as an upscale French-Indian restaurant in Bishop Arts (located in Dallas County). Sabrina and her mother are both Afghan-Americans. At a young age, Afifa and her four siblings were all sent abroad with one going to Pakistan, another to Germany, one to Poland, and another to India. Afifa, herself, was sent to Dallas and raised Sabrina as a single mother. Afifa's passionate love for cooking drove her to apply to (and attend) culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu. For the Nayeb family, food in all forms — whether it be eating out at restaurants, cooking at

⁴ Note that following the period of this study, the Flower Mound location of Urban Tadka was closed down and sold to another Indian restaurant that brought in a new menu and new team.

home, or simply the act of eating — are the activities that are associated with family reunification, togetherness, and blissfulness. In 2016, Afifa's siblings came to the United States and formed Nayeb Hospitality Group (NHG) which has financed Afifa and Sabrina's restaurant concepts. Laili, which Afifa Nayeb opened in 2016, is an eatery in the Dallas Farmers Market that features Afghan foods, juices, and drinks. Following that in 2017, Afifa and Sabrina built 8 Cloves together – a concept that offered a variety of "Indian classics" and fusion dishes on a Thali Platter. Also located in the Dallas Farmers Market, 8 Cloves was initially launched for the purposes of research and development to test the Dallas eating market's response to Indian food for a future upscale Indian fusion restaurant concept. Eventually, its immense success allowed it to develop into its own stand-alone business and enabled the launch of Âme in 2021. Âme for Sabrina and Afifa is their biggest dream. It combines Afifa French culinary training with both women's Afghan ties to Indian culture. Sabrina speaks fondly of growing up watching Bollywood and relying on Hindi-Indian entertainment as a form of cultural identification. In addition to these three food concepts, Sabrina launched Juice Babe in 2019, a smoothie and juice bar located in the Dallas Farmers Market with a brick-and-mortar location coming soon to Greenville (located in Dallas County). For this study 8 Cloves was visited on July 27th from 5 PM to 8:30 PM; Âme was visited on August 1st from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM.

Limitations of Methodology

In utilizing interviews, site visits, and observations to comment on the functions and values of Indian food restaurants, it is important to first discuss the limitations of the study's methodology. Most of 2020 and significant portions of 2021 were affected by the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), an airborne virus, which led to state-mandated shutdowns of not only businesses but entire sectors of society. The stay-at-home orders required in the state of Texas were issued throughout 2020 and asked residents to remain at home, leaving only for essential needs like food, groceries, and work (in large part, only those deemed essential workers by the state were required to work in person). The impact of COVID-19 can be seen on the restaurant industry in ways that have been studied by scholars in the field of finance, management, marketing, and supply chain management. Though the relationship of COVID-19 to the business operations and financial measures of the enterprises included in this study are evaluated in the

following section, the influence of COVID-19 on this study's methodology greatly reduced the time available to observe sites. Interviews, as well as observation, were scheduled for June of 2021, immediately following the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) new guidelines, released in May of 2021, that allowed for in-person, indoors interactions between vaccinated individuals. The methodology of this study complied with CDC guidelines including wearing a mask at all times.

As a final note, the effects of COVID-19, as well as the time restrictions, greatly limited the number of businesses that this study was able to engage with. Restaurateurs were included based on the characteristics of their enterprise with consideration to response time, feasibility, and accessibility. There were other enterprises that this study initially sought out to work with, but due to resource constraints and environmental circumstances, these enterprises had closed down or were not reachable. Cuisines featured in this study, therefore, are representative of the Northern part of India (particularly the Punjab region), and there are several relevant restaurant models that are missing from this study including: eateries located in South Asian grocery stores and eateries and kitchens located in temples and places of worship.

The decision to utilize the REA framework in regard to COVID-19 was intentional, for the REA methodology consolidates the research process without sacrificing quality for time. REA supports rapid response and is carried out over a compressed time period. For research projects that are time-sensitive or contextually limited, REA draws on the internal knowledge of local groups as a valuable source of data. Moreover, REA's seek to capture findings that are current and timely, and its design uniquely allows for the study to incorporate local conditions into its analysis. The REA methodology, itself, has its own set of limitations and critiques which should be considered. The findings of REAs, while not immediately generalizable, produce

valuable insights and lessons that can inform decisions and future projects, and it is the goal of this project to build a dialogue for understanding Indian food enterprises as ambidextrous organizations whose cultural commodities create untold value for its communities.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Introduction

Forty years ago, there were under ten Indian restaurants in Dallas Fort-Worth. These restaurants had a mixture of Indian and non-Indian owners and served a culturally salient combination of curries and kebabs to a white American white collar customer base during the lunch hour and a South Asian clientele in the evenings. Indian restaurants, in 2021, are integrated into the DFW foodscape with some estimates accounting for over five hundred Indian restaurant enterprises across Collin, Dallas, Denton, and Tarrant County. This growth can be attributed to the movement of South Asians into and within the metroplex as technology companies move to Dallas-Fort Worth and facilitate the migration of South Asians into the United States through H-1B Visas. In 2019, the total population of South Asians in the Dallas metro area was 258,000 with 208,000 Indians; 25,000 Pakistanis; 15,000 Nepalese; 7,000 Bangladeshis; 2,000 Sri Lankans; and 1,000⁵ Bhutanese. As noted in the methodology section, the foods of Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and Bhutanese peoples are diverse and varied across country, region, religion, class, and caste (where applicable). These unique, varied food traditions are brought into the United States by migrants, appearing first in the domestic sphere where cooking techniques and recipes are retained. However, the visibility of these differences in South Asian foods is slower to translate into the public foodscape. We must consider how South Asians, as a whole, have been fundamentally connected to the Indian restaurant industry. Historically, there have been very few non-Indian South Asian restaurants, and for those that have existed, they have been interpellated as being “Indian.” By reducing South Asian food to

⁵ While all other data was extracted from 2019 data, the population of Bhutanese in DFW could only be found using data from 2015. In comparing known populations of Bhutanese in cities from 2015 to 2019, the population likely has increased to exceed 1,000.

“Indian” food, non-Indian South Asian culture has been actively erased from Dallas-Fort Worth. This erasure has and continues to be perpetuated by both non-South Asians and Indians, who make up the majority of DFW’s South Asian population (83.2%).

The usage of the terms “South Asian” and “Indian” throughout this section are not used interchangeably. Rather, they are used separately to address the ways in which South Asians willingly and unwillingly participate in and in some cases facilitate the collapse of borders within the South Asian diaspora. Vivek Bald^{xxxi} writes about the historical ways in which peoples belonging to certain ethnicities, classes (and castes where applicable), and religious groups — namely “a largely Indian and Hindu South Asian immigrant bourgeoisie” — have had more hegemonic power in defining expectations and geographies of South Asian. These groups perpetuate a homogenized, non-threatening narrative of South Asians as assimilable which then creates erasures and exclusions in the diaspora of those who are “beyond the boundaries of acceptable difference.” These dynamics can be studied in the entrance of “Indian” food into American restaurant landscapes. Because “Indian food” has been used as a catch-all term to describe all foods from the South Asian region the Indian food restaurant industry must be tethered to a larger South Asian community. Restaurants that are perceived as being Indian may in fact have a Pakistani owner and serve Pakistani food, but the positioning and orientation of the restaurant may lead to it being marketed and perceived as an Indian restaurant.

Throughout this paper, the terms “Indian” and “South Asian” are used distinctively to explore collective belonging and exclusions in the South Asian diaspora with respect to the positioning of so-called Indian restaurants, the food they serve, the identities of their employees and owners, and their respective consumer bases. The supply of Indian restaurateurs and foods has increased to match the new needs of younger migrants and migrant families for familiar

cultural sites. From this need has come a cultural landscape that supports the socio-economic needs of South Asian Americans. South Asian restaurants; places of worship like temples, gurdwaras, mosques, and even religious schools; local and chain South Asian grocery retailers; community centers for cultural celebrations; clothing retail shops; and arts cultural enterprises like dance studios are some of the physical changes to the DFW's business landscape that sustain the process of cultural recreation for South Asian communities. The steady increase in the overall South Asian population. This has been accompanied by a rise in non-Indian South Asian ethnic restaurants, specifically Bangladeshi and Pakistani restaurants, in DFW that have been able to distinguish themselves from "Indian cuisine."

In the United States, cross-cultural consumption has become a normal practice in a way that it is not in many parts of South Asia. The power dynamics incited through race, gender, and class create economies of consumption that are fueled by cultural commodification and fetishization. These patterns of consumption are not abnormal, and they are not restricted to any one group. As such, the cultural enterprises that emerge as spaces of sustenance become sites for cross-cultural consumption at a scale where ethnic enterprises influence the perception, treatment, and status of their respective ethnic communities. In other words, the enterprise values its cultural artifacts and has the intended or unintended consequence of valuing the peoples attributed to such artifacts.

While not mutually exclusive, the relationship between the value of artifacts and the value of people is influenced by each other. By looking at restaurants — one of the most accessible sites of cross-cultural consumption — this relationship can be analyzed. Specifically, the business models that guide that strategic decision-making, operations, and marketing reveal the methodology that restaurants utilize to position themselves in the South Asian community,

the DFW community, and the DFW food landscape. Every component of a restaurant's design is intentional from its branding to its clientele to its food offerings and every part of the customer experience is constructed.

The purpose of this study was to consider the business model⁶ of six enterprises in Dallas-Fort Worth and how they chose to position themselves against other Indian restaurants and other non-Indian restaurants through their marketing, operations, and strategy.⁷ An important component of these three areas of study is the people involved in the business — owners, customers, and employees. These agents have a critical role in measuring the intentions and grounding the realities of each Indian restaurant's relationship with its communities and foods. In the following section, I will discuss the findings of the ethnographies which were conducted over a period of two weeks in July through August of 2021. When conducting the ethnographies, it became apparent that there were similarities between certain restaurant's models, and even more, there were similarities in the differences between certain restaurants.

I began to implicitly categorize and compare restaurants to each other and to restaurants outside of this study in a way that helped me understand how the Indian restaurant industry has segmented itself. I have chosen to organize my findings by these categories which focus largely on the model used by the restaurant to position itself and its operations. The categories are as

⁶ While there are hundreds of definitions of what a business model is, it is best defined as the model used by a business to create, deliver, and capture value. In a nine-part model developed by Alex Osterwalder and studied in many business courses, a business model is organized around a set of assumptions about a value chain. Osterwalder argues that key activities, key resources, value propositions, customer relationships, channels, customer segments, cost structures, and revenue streams can be studied and compared amongst businesses to develop business strategy. For this study, these elements are considered in the context of businesses' marketing strategies, operations, and overall strategy. Note that with respect to cost structures and revenue streams, the discussion in this section is limited to pricing models.

⁷ There is a key distinction between marketing and business strategy regarding their function in the business model. Business strategy is critical for establishing your business goals — what you want to do and how you want to get there. It is essential to maintaining business operation, position and direction, growth, financing, and marketing among other things. Marketing and marketing strategy is the means through which a business achieves parts of its strategy. It is related to customer acquisition, branding, and revenue generation.

follows 1) *Traditional, Regionalized Indian Restaurants*; 2) *Fast, Casual, Indian-American Restaurants*; 3) *Upscale, Formal Indian Restaurants*. In choosing to compare restaurants to each in this manner as opposed to by ownership, by geography, or in chronological order, there can be an opportunity to consider the substitutability of Indian restaurants to each other as well as to analyze the differences between the segments of the industry and potential for growth and the limitations to growth. In addition, these findings have been presented in the chart below.

Urban Tadka: The Revitalization of a Traditional, Regionalized Approach to Selling Indian Food

Urban Tadka is a bustling, beloved full-service restaurant in the South Asian heart of Dallas Fort-Worth serving homestyle, traditional, and original Punjabi-Indian foods. Owned and operated by co-owners and spouses Happy and Mona Singh, it is a direct consequence of the processes of individual and collective cultural remembrance and recreation exhibited through the diasporic movements of Indians. I first met Happy Singh at his Flower Mound location — he is the one who responded to my request to meet for an interview — and we interviewed on a Tuesday afternoon in the middle of an empty dining hall. I had never been to the Flower Mound location of Urban Tadka as my family, who started frequenting the restaurant the year I left for college, preferred the Irving location.

Happy Singh then proceeds to walk me through the conception, ideation, execution, and management of his two Urban Tadka restaurants. He founded the restaurant with his wife, Mona Singh in 2013, after coming to the United States in 2000 on an H-1 Visa. Growing up in a family of farmers in Punjab, India, Happy Singh attended the Indian Institute of Technology, a public technical university, and started a technology consulting company in India before migrating to the United States. He rotated through several jobs at technology companies but maintained his love for cooking and food through his time as a white-collar employee. His free time on the

weekends and evenings was spent practicing cooking techniques, imagining new recipes, and creating new dishes for his family. In 2010, Happy Singh, having attained his Green Card, opened Urban Tadka Irving in 2013. For ten months he kept his IT job, and in 2014, he fully committed himself to the enterprise.

Urban Tadka is in many ways a traditional family-oriented restaurant that serves regionalized Punjabi cuisine. The usage of the term "regionalized" seeks to address the fluidity of food in the Punjab region. Happy Singh, whose father migrated from Pakistani Lahore to Indian Amritsar after Partition in 1947, enthusiastically describes to me the similarities between food in Lahore and Amritsar. Namely, he praises both cities for having the best food in the world and attaches his cooking expertise and style to both of these cities.

In calling Urban Tadka a "traditional" restaurant, I am referring to its business model, which follows that of the majority of Indian restaurants located in Dallas-Fort Worth. These restaurants are located near specific neighborhoods with concentrated living or working South Asian populations. These restaurants are operated by South Asians of all backgrounds and serve either broadly regionalized (from multiple states, territories, or countries in South Asia) or specifically regionalized (from a specific state or region) Indian foods to a predominantly South Asian clientele. As indicated by the languages used to name these restaurants, many position themselves within the South Asian community. Most of these restaurants are unable to stay open for more than two to five years because of labor shortages and succession uncertainties.

There have undoubtedly been outliers, like Urban Tadka, who use this model and have remained open for over five years, finding success with a non-South Asian market. The most notable adjustment from the older models used by long-closed restaurants in DFW is the specialization of regionalized cuisines. In larger cities with higher South Asian populations or

even with higher populations of consumers of South Asian food, there is more diversity of the kinds of Indian food served. Indian food in cities like New York City, New York or Edison, New Jersey, or even Houston, Texas is not perceived as homogenous and can take on the identities of individual states, regions, and non-Indian South Asian countries with eaters recognizing and seeking out these differences.

Dallas-Fort Worth in the last five or so years has started to build a new relationship with South Asian food where restaurants serving regionalized cuisines are able to find some success in selling region-specific foods to eaters. In doing so, restaurants can more effectively serve two growing target groups — cross-ethnic customers (which includes South Asians who are not from the region that the food being served is from) and American diners seeking "authentic" cultural food experiences. Happy and Mona Singh, despite starting Urban Tadka in a crowded Indian restaurant market, distinguished themselves as one of the only Punjabi restaurants in the area serving home-style recipes from Lahore and Amritsar.

Within a cultural landscape, there may be sites for community gatherings that are tied to food. Grocery stores and restaurants, specifically, serve as familiar sites of exchange, interaction, and comfort for diasporic subjects. Urban Tadka Irving has served its community first and foremost as a recognizable, accessible space for its South Asian community members to gather. This is facilitated through its brand marketing, its physical internal design, and its functions beyond the restaurant storefront. The name “Urban Tadka” uses the Hindi word “Tadka” which describes a common South Asian cooking technique that involves frying something in oil or ghee and aromatic seasoning. While there are some South Asian cooking terms and foods that are recognizable by the greater American public (such as Roti, Naan, even Tandoori), the word “tadka” is more so recognizable to South Asians who are either familiar with the term or the

technique. The process of tempering is given different names in different South Asian languages: Poron in Bengali; Thaalitha in Tamil; Thalimpu or Tiragamata in Telugu; and Baghaar in Urdu; Vaghar in Gujarati. The name suggests familiarity and traditionalism but also novelty and modernity by combining “tadka” with “urban.”

The menu supports this by combining household Punjabi dishes eaten by Happy and Mona Singh along with original creations invented by Happy Singh. They procure Indian ingredients such as spices from Indian wholesalers in New York, produce and cooking oils from the restaurant supply store, meat from a Chinese wholesaler, and even some ingredients like buttermilk from Costco. Happy Singh shares that he and his wife, Mona Singh, built the menu together. Though he candidly states that Mona Singh is a better cook than him, Happy Singh prefers to stay in the kitchen and was the restaurant's first chef. His love for food and experimentation inspires him to not only cook the traditional and familiar dishes of his past, but continually seek out new ingredients, new techniques, and new taste combinations.



He believes that part of Urban Tadka's value proposition is the continual expansion and innovation of their menu as he adds new menu items every year. The organization of the menu is

fairly standard for Indian restaurants, containing a long list of items divided into categories such as naan/bread; chawal/rice; biryani; subzian/veggies; from our tandoor; lamb specialties; etc. On the online menu, there are not even descriptions for each menu item (note that the physical menu has short descriptions under ten words describing a few of the dish ingredients and style of cooking).

The quality of food rather than the novelty of food seems to attract South Asian customers. According to Happy Singh, regular customers will typically order the same dishes. However, many returning customers will give Happy Singh free reign over their meal — requesting that he make a new or special dish for them. The high level of trust between customers and the owner strengthens the loyalty of their customer base.



Urban Tadka Irving is located in the city of Irving, geographically located immediately Northwest of Dallas. Irving's population of South Asians has been growing exponentially since the early 2000s with many H-1 Visa recipients relocating themselves to Irving for technology and engineering jobs. Happy Singh, himself, lived in Irving for seven years (from 2000-2007). With such a large Indian population, the city's cultural landscape has been shaped by socio-religious landmarks, like places of worship, restaurants and grocery stores, and community centers, that support the needs of diasporic migrants.

Urban Tadka was located off of Interstate 635 (also known as I-635) — a freeway that loops around Dallas and Tarrant County — which makes it a ten to fifteen-minute drive from several major religious centers (BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, DFW Hindu Temple, Shirdi Sai Center of Texas, and Gurdwara Nishkam Seva). The shopping plaza that Urban Tadka was located in also contained a Patel Brothers, a Swadeshi Plaza, and an India Bazaar with more than a dozen Indian restaurants located within five miles of the site. When describing the decision-making process involved in choosing Irving as his first location, Happy Singh cites the high volume of existing Indian restaurants and the available consumer market of Indian migrants working in the technology industry. The accessibility of Urban Tadka's restaurant front was an essential part of its business model. The choice to situate itself amongst a high density South Asian population, and even more so, amongst other recognizable cultural sites, is an indication that Urban Tadka was first positioned to appeal to a certain demographic.

Happy Singh expanded into Flower Mound, a city with a significantly higher population of White Americans (78.9%) as opposed to Irving population of White Americans (47.9%),^{xxxii} to geographically reposition the enterprise to face an American market. Flower Mound, with significantly fewer Indian-Americans and fewer corresponding cultural sites, cannot operate as an insular, self-sustaining ethnic economy. Cultural enterprises must rely on non-Indian customers to survive. As Happy Singh expanded into Flower Mound, he recalls that, at the time, there were only three Indian restaurants, all of which served "South"⁸ Indian food. He opened his

⁸ Within this context, as in the vernacular of many so-called North Indians, the term "South" Indian is used to describe persons and cultures from the Southernmost states of India, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Though the usage of terms like "North Indian" and "South Indian" can appear to be used purely as geographic references to the states in Northern and Southern India, it asserts notions of cultural difference and power dynamics related to stereotypes, colorism, religious differences, and "otherness." Further, in using "North" and "South" to describe Indian people, cultures, religions, and states of origin, the heterogeneity of Indian culture (which differs across state, class, caste, religious, and gender identities) is erased.

restaurant to address a gap in the market. Since opening Urban Tadka Irving he has been able to sustain a majority non-India customer base of 70 to 80% “American” customers. Whereas in Irving, the physical environment accommodates the needs of immigrants seeking to recreate what is familiar, Flower Mound and many other cities in Dallas-Fort Worth are not reshaping their landscapes in the same way for new immigrant communities.

Regarding the environment built inside the restaurant, there are three rooms for customers to move through. First, a waiting room for large parties waiting to be seated and a stand for take away orders. There is then a main dining room where customers can seat themselves with a collection of booths, large tables, and small tables that can easily be rearranged. In this room, there is a buffet against the back wall that operates during lunchtime. Finally, past the dining hall, there is a small banquet hall in the backroom for large party gatherings.

The decor throughout the Irving location was minimal with the most important cultural artifacts being Happy and Mona Singh’s wedding Fulkari — a handmade, traditional wedding cloth — framed and hung on one of the walls. Happy Singh attributes the decor and interior to his wife, who was a fashion designer in India. He describes that the utensils, plate ware, and cups are all from Punjab and were either shipped to him by family or bought by him on visits home. The seating throughout the restaurant is a combination of booths and easy-to-move four-person tables that had been reconfigured to accommodate the eight and ten-person parties dining. While customer patterns and behaviors will be discussed in further detail at the end of this section, the theme of communal togetherness, connection, and reconnection were all enabled by the internal built environment. Several dining parties were celebrating large party (over ten people) birthdays.

On one occasion, Happy Singh came out of the kitchen where he was cooking and greeted familiar and new customers. More than once, individuals dining with one party knew members of a separate dining party that they had not come with. The presence of a community echoed in the interactions customers had with each other, with employees, and with Happy and Mona Singh. Equally important to these interactions is the level of comfort that customers appeared to experience in the space. All customers ate with their hands with most tables speaking a language other than English amongst themselves and at times with the Punjabi-Sikh waitress. The relationships of the restaurant enterprise and its community extend beyond the walls of the restaurant and are apparent in the external activities of "Urban Tadka," as a caterer for Indian weddings and events.

Urban Tadka's transformation of an old model of serving Indian food has enabled it to find success outside of the Indian community. Happy Singh estimated that the Flower Mound location of Urban Tadka significantly more "American" diners and certainly more Non-White, Non-South Asian eaters not only because his location was one of only four Indian restaurants in Flower Mound, but also because his food was praised in Dallas-based magazines and had positive online reviews. The role of online reviews in the search for "authentic cuisine" cannot be looked over, and it is critical to think of the impact of positive or negative reviews made by cultural "insiders" (people appearing to be Punjabi, Indian, or South Asian) in attracting non-South Asian and even non-Indian eaters. The Flower Mound location, which Happy Singh proudly estimated had 70-80% non-Indian customers, was successful in penetrating the American market. Urban Tadka Irving and Flower Mound both had relationships with the community that extended beyond the restaurant front. Urban Tadka's connectedness and popularity in the Indian community fuel their catering business.

Happy Singh notes that Urban Tadka is asked to cater several wedding receptions a month, serving anywhere from 300 to 600 guests. These catering jobs introduce or reintroduce hundreds of customers to Urban Tadka and reinforce the connections between restaurant enterprises, food, and community building. It should be noted that after the period of study, Urban Tadka Flower Mound was sold to another restaurant owner for reasons that cannot be discussed in this paper. Urban Tadka Irving is now the sole location, and it is where Happy and Mona Singh work. What has enabled Urban Tadka Irving to survive for almost a decade is its deep relationship with its community, particularly its responsiveness to the needs of the community with respect to design, operations, and external activities.

8 Cloves & Roti Grill: The Welcoming of a Fast-Casual Model for the Everyday Consumption of Indian Food

The new development of fast-casual Indian eateries in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex is reflective of a different approach to bringing Indian food into the mainstream. By repositioning Indian restaurants from structures that face inwards to the communities to sites for external-facing exchange, fast-casual restaurants have been able to serve as accessible entry points for eaters unfamiliar with Indian food. Fast-casual eateries seek to elevate the business model of fast-food restaurants by offering higher-quality foods without full service. They combine convenience with taste to appeal to a broad, mobile consumer base.

While fast-casual restaurants are not a new phenomenon in DFW, the steady growth of such models for Indian cuisine can be seen in restaurants and counters seen in Indian grocery stores as well as storefronts and food stalls located in high traffic neighborhoods. In this study, ethnographies conducted at Roti Grill Dallas, Roti Grill Frisco, and 8 Cloves: Spices of India (also known as 8 Cloves) underscore the function of fast-casual eateries in normalizing Indian

food in the American food landscapes. Roti Grill, started by the Indian restaurateur Pardeep Sharma, was a simplification of his upscale Indian dining restaurant. Its first location was built in Dallas in 2000 and its second location launched in Frisco in 2017.

8 Cloves: Spices of India is owned and operated by Nayeb Hospitality Group (NHG) which is owned by mother and daughter Afifa and Sabrina Nayeb. 8 Cloves, originally a test kitchen concept, was built into a stand-alone enterprise after finding success with customers. By adopting a methodology for presenting and selling Indian foods, fast-casual restaurants can remove some of the barriers to Indian food that have been traditionally present in American food landscapes. These restaurants brilliantly manufacture a new Indian restaurant experience for customers that manages and meets the expectations of diners for novel, adventurous dishes in a palatable, recognizable environment. The design of these sites – from the name to the interior décor to the menu and food presentation – rescales the experience of eating Indian food to something that is "less foreign."

In studying these restaurants, it was found that location played a critical role in determining how the enterprise would be perceived by potential customers. Each restaurant was located in high-traffic shopping centers, geographically surrounded by a high volume of business offices alongside other shops and eateries. The Roti Grill Dallas storefront was located off of Highway 75 and Henderson. This particular area of Dallas is a popular shopping and eating spot with Chipotle and Restoration Hardware Rooftop being equal distances from the Roti Grill site. It is on the edge of Highland Park – one of the wealthiest zip codes in the country and the wealthiest neighborhoods in DFW. Similarly, Roti Grill Frisco was located in an area of Frisco known as "The Star." This commercial center contains the Dallas Cowboys training facility, built only in 2018, and has since expanded to include residential high rises, several medical facilities,

and nearly a dozen restaurants. The Star is located right off the Dallas North Tollway and is a popular area for business meetings and family activities. Pardeep Sharma, the owner of five Indian restaurant concepts explains that the relationship between location, model, and market, for ethnic enterprises in one where location and model must meet the market where it is. In his near-40 years in DFW's Indian restaurant industry, he has expertly designed restaurant models that centralize the needs and expectations of both Indian and non-Indian customers to deliver experiences that differently engage both customer groups.

8 Cloves, too, meets their market with a restaurant that aligns expectation with execution. 8 Cloves is located inside the Dallas Farmers Market in the arts district of Downtown Dallas. It is at the intersection of two major highways and walking distance to the Dallas Museum of Art and Klyde Warren Park (a popular outdoor green space). In the market, the restaurant front takes up twice the space of any other vendor with a counter for ordering and shared seating for all of the market. In each of the restaurant's geographic areas, there is a variety in the types of eaters frequenting restaurants, whether it be corporate employees on a lunch break, families going out for a meal, or a group of friends meeting up for a quick bite. It places Indian food at the center of a popular, exciting food hub in Downtown Dallas, and instead of asking customers to seek it out, aims to appeal to customers that are already at the food hall. This strategy of meeting customers where they are is embedded into the customer acquisition process for all three fast-casual models.

Though there is no apparent relationship between the selection of these sites and the presence of a high South Asian population, the locations chosen for both Roti Grills and 8 Cloves share a physical proximity to whiteness either in the part of the city they are located or in the key demographic of the commercial center they are located. This intentional choice has

allowed Roti Grill Dallas, Roti Grill Frisco, and 8 Cloves to tap into a group of eaters that have historically expressed interest in Indian food since the 1980s when it entered the metroplex's food scene.⁹ For instance, the diners at Roti Grill are predominantly white-collar corporate employees working in the business districts across Dallas and Frisco. Fast-casual restaurants have long positioned themselves as substitutable alternatives to one another to attract the lunch crowds created by corporate work schedules. Even Urban Tadka is able to benefit from this customer market with Happy Singh estimating that thirty to forty percent of their lunchtime customers are American business professionals.

The business models used by these fast-casual eateries are fairly consistent. This can be seen, first, in the location selection of each site. The other key elements of the models employed by Roti Grill and 8 Cloves pertain to branding and marketing as well as operations and logistics. Much of their model simply modify the practices used in traditional Indian restaurants to create a comfortable environment not for South Asian eaters but instead for non-South Asian eaters and those unfamiliar with Indian cuisine.

Whereas Urban Tadka builds an accessible environment by making its business — its menu, its service, its people — seamless with the South Asian community, Roti Grill and 8 Cloves have had to alter these practices to welcome non-South Asian eaters to Indian foods. For eaters seeking to incorporate "exotic" experiences into their everyday life — Roti Grill and 8 Cloves become substitutable with other non-European "ethnic" cuisines like Thai or "Mediterranean." Therefore, the space created inside of the restaurant must juggle the expectation that eaters have with the undefined boundaries that eaters have for their dining

⁹ According to Pardeep Sharma, the first Indian restaurants located near Dallas, including his first venture, Kebab, and Curry (open until 1989) attracted professionals during the lunch hour. Specifically, he shared that young lawyers and professionals would line up outside his restaurant during the lunch hour and after work.

experience. In studies conducted by Michael D. Clemes^{xxxiii} and Jong-Hyeong Kim, Hyewon Youn, Yong Rao¹⁰ it was found that “ethnic restaurant patrons” select restaurants with high-quality dishes that offer exotic dishes with distinctive flavors because customers expect authentic dining experiences from their food to their environment. However, in these “exotic” experiences, customers still want more familiar authentic stimuli (such as taste and ingredients).¹¹

The success of enterprises like Roti Grill and 8 Cloves lies in their ability to masterfully design their menu, dishes, internal environment, and food service to meet this need. While different in the overall design, all three restaurants used a similar design methodology that centers around using what I call “ambiguously oriental décor.” I use this term because the décor seems to lean into the vague, non-specific “oriental” designs and artifacts that are incohesive with one another but exoticize the environment in familiar ways that align closely with orientalist fantasies of the east. Design elements that play on this style include color palette, artifact placement, and artwork. Inside of the Roti Grill Dallas was a Buddha Statue and a statue of Radha and Krishna, inside Roti Grill Frisco there was an assortment of large Holi prints on the wall, and painted on the vendor front of the 8 Cloves was an image of two hands folded together with purple, yellow, and orange mandalas drawn in the background.

¹⁰ Kim, Jong-Hyeong, Hyewon Youn, and Yong Rao. “Customer Responses to Food-Related Attributes in Ethnic Restaurants.” *International journal of hospitality management* 61 (2017): 129–139.

¹¹ There is a delicate balance between a pleasant new eating experience and an unpleasurable new eating experience that is tied to controlled environmental factors. For instance, unfamiliar dish names add value to a customer's experience by enhancing the perceived authenticity of a dish and unfamiliar ingredients similarly enhance the perceived authenticity of a dish. The way that perceived authenticity intersects with the diner's experience is correlated with the familiarity of ingredients. Essentially, diners show stronger negative emotions towards unfamiliar ingredients than familiar ones which are attributable to food neophobia.



Interestingly, Roti Grill Dallas and Roti Grill Frisco had dramatically different interiors. Roti Grill Dallas' walls were painted bright blues and pinks, and other than the wall of the restaurant that the kitchen and ordering stand took up, three of the four walls were windowed. Contrastingly, Roti Grill Frisco had a more somber, intimate setting with more décor on the walls and vastly different darker and more formal furniture than Roti Grill Dallas.¹²

The food itself at each of these locations was an assortment of pan-Indian foods, American food, and a few fusion elements. Roti Grill had a kid's meal with chicken nugget, and 8 Cloves had a breakfast section of their menu with French Toast. As such, the menu at each location leaned into a limited, overly simplified understanding of Indian food that gently introduced or reintroduced eaters to popularized dishes such as "chicken tikka" or "vegetarian thali" or easy-to-understand fusion-like entrees such as "paneer wrap" or "roti tacos." The menus all used combined Hindi and English food terminology, such as "Lamb Vindaloo" or "Rajma

¹² A unique value proposition utilized by Roti Grill Frisco in particular, that has allowed them to serve an adjacent demographic, is their ability to seamlessly transform the internal environment of the restaurant from lunchtime to dinner time. Roti Grill Frisco had the lowest customer foot traffic during the period of study, barely reaching 50% capacity at the peak of the lunch hour. However, based on conversations with employees and the experiences of customers who visited during the dinner hour, the restaurant regularly reaches full capacity during the evening hours.

Red Beans Curry" or "Eggplant Bharta" so that customers knew exactly what the ingredient highlighted in each dish was. Each menu item was accompanied with a six-to-ten-word description that included the main vegetables and/or meats used in the dish, a description of the dish as a "rice" or "curry," and one or two spices contained in the dish.

Furthermore, on Roti Grill's menu, there was an option to upgrade to a "Texas meal" portion of each entrée to make it shareable. Food was prepared in a semi-open kitchen at all three restaurants where customers could see into the area that food was prepared and plated. When food was served to customers, it was apparent that there was a focus put on the presentation. Serving plate ware was white, with sauces in single-serve bowls, and wraps being placed on a bed of mixed greens. Eaters could easily clearly see the vegetables and meats/panner included in their dish. Each entrée could be eaten by one person and came with a bed of rice on the plate (as opposed to say Urban Tadka where rice was ordered separately from each entrée).

All of these design elements present Indian food as something less “foreign” and inconceivable, by building an introductory environment that allows consumers to experience Indian-ness and Indian food in a low stake, low-pressure environment. Without the presence of waiters or even other South Asians who carry an expectation of what the food is and how it should be eaten, customers can be more experimental with their food without judgment. Many customers chose to eat with silverware at both of these locations, and at Roti Grill – where the seating was a mix between booths and tables – all dining parties chose to eat at a booth.

For restaurants like Roti Grill and 8 Cloves to exist in DFW, have reliable customer bases, and receive continual praise in food blogs and websites is social proof that the fast-casual model is effective. Though it is undeterminable from this study how many of these customers consume other forms of Indian and South Asian food, it is worthwhile to explore the dynamics of

the limitations of fully “authentic” experiences. The need for restaurants to modify themselves and relent parts of their cultural identity to a larger hegemonic food culture is valid and has the power of introducing untapped markets to ethnic cuisines.

Âme & India Palace: From Fusion to Formal Dining the Untapped Market for High Brow.

Upscale Indian Dining

The function of upscale, formal restaurants has been closely studied and observed by academics and food critics alike. Upscale dining and most notably the value associated with its higher prices immediately creates a higher risk environment in which customers expect their expectations to be met and exceeded. For ethnic restaurants, the question of what *is* considered upscale is closely tethered to limitations of what cuisines *can* inherit their prestige and status associated with upscale restaurants.

The existence of an upscale restaurant to exist, requires an offering that incites customers to increase their willingness to pay. While that offering does not necessarily have to be the food itself, ethnic restaurants often rely on cultural elements to combine food and environment to then create an experience. Many ethnic restaurants find it difficult to differentiate the food from the perception of people. For instance, Indian restaurants, to eaters not familiar with India or Indian food, become a part of how eaters will then perceive India, Indians, and even South Asia and non-Indian South Asians. This is because restaurants are a site for cultural transfer where one might have their first and only experience with a culture, group of people, or a part of the world.

The final two ethnographies for this study are both upscale Indian restaurants that bookmark the history of Indian restaurants in Dallas Fort Worth. Pardeep Sharma opened India Palace in 1985, and it is one of the first and oldest Indian restaurants in the metroplex. Pardeep Sharma was born in New Delhi and throughout college in India knew that he wanted to work in

the hospitality industry. After migrating to New York and completing courses in hospitality management, a friend opening a restaurant in Dallas urged him to again migrate to Dallas. While India Palace has been open for nearly forty years, his first restaurant venture in the United States was Kebab and Curry which he opened with a partner in the early 1980s and closed in 1989. Pardeep Sharma describes the growth and expansion of the Indian food market in Dallas candidly with a slow-adapting, but increasingly more accepting “American” customer base. Since his first ventures, he knew that his models would have to rely on non-Indian customer bases, citing the preference of Indians for home-cooked dishes. The model used for India Palace should be closely analyzed for the way its model has resonated with both Indian communities and non-India communities across the entire metroplex.

The second upscale restaurant included in this study is *Âme* which is owned and operated by the family-run Nayeb Hospitality Group (NHG). The founders of NHG are Afifa Nayeb and her daughter Sabrina Nayeb. Both Sabrina and Afifa are Afghan-Americans, with Afifa migrating to the United States as a single mother. In my time speaking with Sabrina, a lively and charismatic restaurateur who in May of 2021 graduated with her MBA from Southern Methodist University, I learned about the strategic entrance of *Âme* into the Indian restaurant scene. *Âme* specializes in creating Indian dishes with a French technique and is the fourth and newest food enterprise in NHG. Sabrina describes it as her and her mother's biggest dream, combining her mother's French cooking training with her business and design expertise. Because of the success of earlier ventures such as 8 Cloves: Spices of India, Laila, and Juice Babe, *Âme*, though conceived as an idea years earlier, only opened its doors in the Summer of 2021.

Together, India Palace — one of the first Indian restaurants to appear in Dallas-Fort Worth— and *Âme* — the newest Indian restaurant in Dallas Fort Worth — tell the story of

Indian upscale restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth. Though both businesses were operated and managed with similar business models, the cultural experience being offered to customers was differentiated by the food itself and the tactics used to market it. India Palace has become a historically iconic and universally known spot for the first waves of the DFW metroplex's South Asian community. Many immigrants who moved to Dallas in the 1980s and early 2000s know it as the first Indian restaurant they ate at in Dallas, and its relevance in the South Asian community is multi-generational and multi-ethnic. Its appeal to non-South Asian eaters is proven by its dozens of awards and glowing reviews in mainstream Dallas newspapers and blog sites. *Âme*, too, has created some buzz in the South Asian community but has followed India Palace in utilizing media and reviews to assert its value to diners. The functional similarity between *Âme* and India Palace is that both restaurants clearly and strategically create a cultural experience for diners that responds to the romanticized, orientalist fantasies of Asia. This manufactured experience starts with the names of each establishment and carries into the built environment of the restaurant and the dining experience of consumers.

The names of both restaurants suggest the grandeur, elegance, and worldliness of Indian cuisine. "India Palace" alludes to eaters that they are about to experience the glory of India through a refined experience in which they are the patrons of Indian food. "*Âme*"¹³ goes even further to romanticize the experience of eaters by choosing a French name for the restaurant – separating itself from Indian cuisine entirely. Fusion restaurants often have this power to selectively combine cultural elements with the key consideration of what will sell better. It is my belief that this naming strategy is attractive to customers seeking high-brow cultural experiences because it implicitly suggests that the dining experience will be a civilized rendition of Indian

¹³ *Âme* translates to "soul" in French.

food. The experiential design of both restaurants carries itself into the built internal environment of the site. India Palace¹⁴ and Âme¹⁵ use decor and spatial design to further immerse diners in a novel cultural experience in rather different ways.

At India Palace, customers enter the restaurant store-front they were met with the hostess stand. The dining room was separated from the entryway and the bar by large walls with only a door shape in the middle for customers to exit and enter through. These walls enabled only lighting from the front door to enter the dining hall as there were no interior windows. Tables were scattered in between two aisles of semi-private booths. The dining hall pointed towards the kitchen with a clear pathway for servers to walk through, but the kitchen was out of sight from customers. The walls were painted a warm orange color, and though the dining hall had no décor, the entryway had a bamboo plant and a large, displayed bodhisattva statue.

The interior of India Palace created a mysterious and intimate atmosphere where diners could imagine that they were separated from a world outside of the restaurant. Pardeep Sharma explains that when designing India Palace, he wanted to use sleek minimalism, expressing a distaste for the excessively ornate decor historically expected of ethnic restaurants. He states that a cultural restaurant should not force its culture on customers. Instead, cultural institutions should invite guests into the space through a softer environment.

¹⁴ A quick note about the geographic location of India Palace: its geographic location off of a major toll road that connects the Northern part of the metroplex to the city of Dallas and a freeway that connects Dallas, Denton, and Collin County has made it accessible to eaters from nearly every part of Dallas-Fort Worth.

¹⁵ Âme was located in Bishop Arts – a high traffic commercial district of Downtown Dallas.



While the three-room physical layout of India Palace is almost identical to Âme, the minimalism of India Palace's decor contrasts with the heavy decor of Âme's interior. Sabrina spoke in great detail about the care with which she designed the interior of Âme, pulling from her travels to France and Italy as well as her love for Bollywood. The entry room contains a large U-shaped bar, a small hostess stand, and is all white with tiled floors and minimal wall art. As customers are seated, they enter the main dining room – separated by a large curtain – which contains just under a dozen tables, each with a fresh white tablecloth. On the sidewall, there was a booth with three tables, fringed overhanging chandeliers, and a collection of partially melted white candles. The colors of the walls alternated between deep green and black with one area taken up by an "Indian" Christian LaCroix wallpaper.



The transformation of the interior space into a chic, trendy atmosphere transports diners to Europe. French pop music played overhead and when diners glanced up, they could see the white art deco paneling on the ceiling. Being that most of the decorative elements are attributable to European-French influence, the few Indian contributions to the space came from first the deep jewel tones of the color scheme and second the framed photos of Bollywood actresses in the restroom.



In both India Palace and Âme, there was a back room with its own set of doors that led to an alternative, more decorative setting. Âme called this room the "Elephant Bar" and it was influenced by French Parisian cocktail lounges. Food is not served in this section, but customers can stop by for a drink during their time in Bishop Arts. India Palace's side room contains two walls of booths and an incredible, extensive collection of cricket artifacts that the owner, Pardeep Sharma had collected in his travels. Neither India Palace nor Âme sought to historically recreate the places that influenced their cuisines through artifacts or scenery. Rather, the vibe curated in both restaurants was ambiguously sleek and cosmopolitan, relying more on lighting, color, and music. It was the environment that diners could project onto and imagine themselves as a part of a place far beyond the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

At the two restaurants, diners would be waited on by servers wearing all black and white. Menus were brought immediately out, and plate ware was set out before the arrival of each party. The menu at Âme was a third of the size of the menu at India Palace, but both were organized by starters, entrees (with seafood, meat, and vegetables having their own section), breads, and dessert. Both menus, also, contained similar types of foods – India Palace’s expansive menu of nonspecific “Northern” Indian foods mainly combined different sauces with different meats and vegetables. The selection of foods on the menu was quite traditional as far as restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth in that it had dishes that were not representative of the foods eaten regularly in the household.

The descriptions on the menu were eight to fifteen words and described the general flavor, larger ingredients (vegetables, proteins), and vague explanation of the sauce and spices (“spicy sauce,” “tomato and herb sauce,” mustard seeds and spices,” “spices”). Âme served a mismatched collection of dishes from different regions of India with French techniques to modify the taste or texture slightly but not necessarily the dish itself. For instance, the masala-baked eggplant seemed to be a variant of Baingan Bharta but instead of frying the ingredients together, they were baked in turmeric béchamel sauce. Menu items had a short description that listed large ingredients (vegetable, proteins) and the names of spices (“saffron butter,” Himalayan salt,” “fenugreek”). Dishes at India Palace and Âme were served on serving dishware as shareable portions, with each diner being given their own plate to serve themselves onto. Most diners ordered one to two alcoholic drinks or a bottle of wine to go with their meal, and a majority of eaters chose to eat with the utensils provided to them.

With a methodology that was similar to the fast-casual Indian restaurants, the food-related experiences of customers were tightly controlled to create a novel experience that relied

heavily on familiar elements such as ingredients. India Palace and Âme, in their branding and marketing, appear to have drastically different offerings for diners. I would argue, however, that their similar business models as upscale Indian restaurants make them substitutable to one another and even to other upscale “ethnic” restaurants. Especially to non-South Asian diners, the Âme’s novel fusion foods and India Palace’s more “traditional” take on Indian food, are being sold to a consumer market that has yet to fully adopt Indian foods. Indian food to most of DFW is still foreign, thus its consumer market is volatile. There is no reliable demographic for Indian restaurants, especially for restaurants that position themselves as higher-end.¹⁶ This will be further elaborated on below in an analysis of the consumer patterns across Indian restaurants. A key takeaway from the ethnographies conducted in Âme and India Palace is that these upscale restaurants have intentionally crafted experiences that in more ways than one transported the palettes and imaginations of eaters to a glamorized version of India, one heavily influenced by British colonization and global capital markets.

Comparing Customer Patterns and Movements Across All Six Restaurants

While this study considers the role of customers in the restaurant space, the data collected on customers rely predominantly on observation. The intensity of COVID-19 during the period of study limited customer participation. Still, customers play an essential role in the functioning of restaurants. Restaurants as for-profit enterprises rely on customer bases for their financial success, so business models are designed to respond to a particular customer group. The process of an enterprise locating, meeting, and satisfying its target markets requires planning, testing, and

¹⁶ Upscale, high-end restaurants cannot rely on customer retention and habitual consumption by the same diners in the way that more traditional Indian restaurants and fast-casual restaurants might be able to. This is because dining at an upscale restaurant is not a habit for many households. Further higher prices, less accessible environments, and more formal atmospheres are not conducive with everyday eating for many.

adjusting elements of the business model. Ethnic restaurants face struggles that are not shared industry-wide because of their perceived continuity with a "respective" ethnic group or community.

In their beginning phases, ethnic restaurants have a degree of autonomy over their position in their community. Restaurants can choose to orient themselves towards their cultural community through elements such as their physical location, naming, menu design, and operations. Restaurants can also choose to face outside of their community, appealing to a broader demographic by aligning marketing and branding with the built environment and operations to create a valuable experience for customers. As such, belonging and otherness have a strong influence on the appeal of ethnic cuisines to members outside of the community.

Even ethnic restaurants that have long normalized their presence in American foodscapes, such as Italian and Chinese food enterprises, must confront the unreliability of a market that has no direct relationship to the cultural artifacts in the enterprise. For example, during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2021, there was a decrease in the number of people ordering Chinese and Italian food. The stigmas associated with the countries of China and Italy had an impact on the restaurant industry that drastically altered supply and demand and led to business closures across the nation.

In response to the decrease in the consumption of these ethnic foods, there was a steady increase in the consumption of Indian food in Dallas-Fort Worth that was pointed out by all three restaurateurs during interviews. Owners cite the increased attention to health and wellness, the desire for comfort foods, and the changing patterns of ordering food during the pandemic. I would theorize that alongside these reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the substitutability of many ethnic cuisines in customer choice patterns. Ethnic restaurants, no matter

how hard they may try, cannot insulate themselves from the global and national politics that facilitate belonging and non-belonging in the United States.

The struggles of Indian food to find a market outside of the Indian community like Chinese or Thai food in the United States or like Indian food in the United Kingdom have been noted by prominent food writers and personalities like Padma Lakshmi and David Chang. Some of the observations from customer behavior patterns in the six restaurants in this study can be used to address this question of the place of Indian food in the American market. Each of the six restaurants had varied customer bases that can be best analyzed by the restaurant categories explored in the section above. This is made apparent not just by the actual people present and dining at the restaurants during the site visits but also by the strategic decisions made by owners in the marketing and operations of the business such as physical location, branding, interior décor, and menu. Because, again, customer patterns are largely predictable by the restaurant model and market orientation, it is not surprising that the similarities and differences between customer groups are parallel to the differences in business model from restaurant to restaurant.

For Urban Tadka, its patrons are almost entirely South Asians, with Happy Singh estimating that 90% of Urban Tadka customers are South Asian. Most parties dining at Urban Tadka had four or more individuals. The average length of stay was one and a half hours, and the restaurant reached capacity and stayed at capacity during the site visit. Three parties were celebrating birthdays with groups of more than ten people. Other dining parties consisted of families leaving the household for a meal — coming from the temple for a meal or meeting up with friends.

Anuja Balasubramaniam and Hetal Jannu, in their interviews, noted the randomness with which Indians consumed Indian foods in a restaurant space. There did not appear to be a driving

factor that drove Indians to go to Indian restaurants, but instead a combination of reasons that led to irregular and selective dining at certain restaurants. The occasion to eat out could be attributed to group gatherings, children who crave certain foods from restaurants, fatigue of cooking in the household, a return to comfort foods, the desire to try a novel food (Indian food from a different region than that cooked in the home or fusion foods, for example), and finally an inability to cook Indian food at home. The usage of the space as a site for togetherness, reconnection, and celebration could be seen in the familiar interactions of customers with members of their own party as well as members of other dining parties and even Urban Tadka employees. In many ways, eaters at Urban Tadka seemed to treat the restaurant space as an extension of their own home. Most tables held conversations in a language other than English, ate their meal with their hands, and felt comfortable taking up space. The difference in the demographic of diners was what differentiated Urban Tadka from the other restaurants in this study.

Roti Grill Frisco, Roti Grill Dallas, and 8 Cloves: Spices of India all had different customer bases that were responding to the fast-casual model used to make Indian food more convenient and less intimidating to non-South Asian diners. Pardeep Singh estimates that 90% of diners at his restaurants are non-South Asian, and the site visits to both Roti Grills aligned with this prediction. Interestingly, South Asians dining at Roti Grill Dallas and Frisco were often accompanied by non-South Asians who would then ask them for recommendations and explanations on menu items. In this way, it appeared as though South Asians would occasionally bring others into the space and serve as a guide for assisting in one's navigation through Indian food. Most of the clientele at the Roti Grill locations were corporate employees – as indicated by their attire and employee IDs – and families (either parent/child or partners) – as indicated by language used to refer to one another. All dining parties were under three people, and upon

entering, parties would spend on average six to seven minutes looking at the menu before ordering.

It was customary for parties to ask the employee taking orders questions about dish tastes and sizes. Most parties ordered one dish per person, and all parties at both sites used silverware to eat their meals. The average length of stay was under an hour with the restaurant filling up by 11:45 AM and emptying out before 1:30 PM (appearing to adhere to a one-hour lunch break). 8 Cloves: Spices of India during the period of study only had two parties dine in the food hall – the remainder of orders were to-go. For individuals ordering in person, it was typical for parties to have food from another food stand in the market and order one to two drinks (most commonly, the mango lassi) from 8 Cloves. Because of this, it is difficult to say what the normal dining patterns and customer interactions with the restaurant are beyond ordering take-out.

When speaking to employees at the restaurant they emphasized that over the weekend the entire dining hall attracts more dine-in customers who choose to order an assortment of foods from different vendors to eat at one of the shared tables. It is important to note that the limitations of Rapid Ethnographic Assessments (REAs) most affected the data collected on fast-casual restaurants. Because site visits were only made once during a time based on interviews with restaurateurs, the range in customer number, movement, and demographic from lunchtime to dinner time service could not be observed.

The similarities in customer movements in Âme and India Palace are due to the similar business models used for both upscale restaurants. At Âme and India Palace parties would spend upwards of an hour and a half in the restaurant with servers and wait staff interacting with customers, on average, every ten to fifteen minutes. Similar to Roti Grill, India Palace's

customers were largely non-South Asian (about 90% of parties), and the restaurant peaked at fifty percent capacity in the main dining hall and bar during the period of study.

Dining parties consisted of three single-person parties who ordered an entrée and a side of rice for themselves. Smaller parties of three to four people were celebrating the end of the week with a celebratory dinner with co-workers, a family dinner, and even double dates. These parties ordered three to four entrees for the table and one to two alcoholic drinks. Several customers were familiar with Pardeep Sharma, the owner of India Palace, saying hello when he walked through the dining hall. Some parties also requested certain waiters for their tables. At Âme, there were two parties of South Asians – indicated by the language being spoken at the table – one of which was a family of four and the other of which was a party of seven celebrating a birthday.

Âme reached full capacity in its main dining hall during the period of study, and dining parties were mainly families of four, couples, and two larger parties (under ten people) celebrating birthdays. Customers seemed unfamiliar with the menu – asking waiters questions about menu items and for recommendations. Parties typically ordered three entrees per table with one order of each of the "breads" and one to two appetizers. At every table, customers ordered alcoholic beverages. While eating, at both Âme and India Palace, all customers used silverware.

The difference between Âme and India Palace's customers appeared to be the relationship of the South Asian community with the establishment and the value created for South Asian and non-South Asian customers. India Palace, as one of the first Indian restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth and, dually, as one of the first upscale Indian restaurants in the region is an established site for both South Asians and non-South Asians. In my interviews with Hetal Jannu and Anuja Balasubramaniam, both chefs mentioned India Palace by name as a site that lives in

the South Asian community's public memory. South Asians visit India Palace for most of the reasons theorized by Jannu and Balasubramaniam, especially group gathering, comfort and nostalgia, and inability to cook Indian food.

Conversely, Âme's value proposition to South Asian eaters is a novel food experience. I would predict that most South Asians who eat at Âme were motivated by curiosity to experience a "high-brow" Indian dining experience and will not return as regular customers. For non-South Asian eaters, Âme entered the food landscape in an era where Indian food is not unfamiliar but also not familiar and where eaters intentionally seek out "authentic" or innovative ethnic food experiences. Despite Indian food's presence in Dallas-Fort Worth's food landscape for about fifty years, interestingly the same factors appear to drive non-South Asian customers to India Palace and Âme.

The six restaurants discussed in this section represent a range of restaurants in the metroplex, and while they do not encompass the nuances of each of the over five hundred Indian and South Asian restaurants in DFW, the business models of these enterprises — from customers to sales and marketing to operations and service — tell us about the relationship between the cultural enterprises, cultural artifacts, and cultural communities in the United States. For all restaurateurs, penetration into the American market was a metric of success. Restaurateurs boasted the diversity of their customers by sharing the rates of non-Indian and non-South Asian diners as a form of market acceptance and prestige. These customer patterns, in many ways, seemed to create competitive advantages by overcoming the unreliability of Indian eaters as a foundational customer base. However, while I think that the expansion of the Indian restaurant industry is reliant on the ability of restaurants to bring non-Indians into the Indian restaurant

industry, there is a pattern of success to be found in restaurants that root themselves in the South Asian community.

For Urban Tadka, the financial and cultural success of their Irving location can be seen in the demographics of their predominantly South Asian customer and their high percentage of return customers. For India Palace, their forty years of survival have earned them a place in memory and the perceived cultural landscape of Indians in Dallas Fort Worth. These customers are loyal not just because they themselves regularly eat at India Palace, but because they continue to seek it out for occasions and gatherings and even recommend it to Indians and non-Indians. Indian and non-Indian South Asian communities are a powerful network for restaurants, and they are (and have been) able to carry an industry of Indian and newly emerging non-Indian South Asian restaurants. It is important to consider the dynamic role of these communities in the evolution of the industry's stability and growth.

Success Metrics: A Transitioning Labor Force and the Question of Succession

In the same way that restaurants carefully position themselves around customer groups, restaurants must examine and align their production, operations, and services with the conditions of the labor market. Though the hiring of employees can seem marginal in the business strategy of an enterprise, it is intimately connected to succession and long-term growth, cost and revenue models, and, for ethnic enterprises, community engagement and "authenticity." Historically in the 20th and early 21st centuries, ethnic enterprise owners have employed members of their own communities or communities that are proximate to their own. Familial and ethnic ties, specifically, have typically benefitted both employees and employers in an exchange between lower wages, unregistered laborers — benefiting the employer — and access to employment, the potential for room and board — benefiting the employee. These dynamics, often perpetuated by

power differences related to class, access to resources, and ethnicity, have in many ways enabled ethnic economies and ethnic landscapes to exist in urban centers and as such are explored in the literature review. With respect to the six enterprises studied, two key findings will be discussed relating to 1) the shift in the racial and ethnic identities of laborers as related to larger changes in migratory pattern and 2) intensive labor commitments, the question of succession, and early exits as a metric of social success.

In a restaurant, there are different employees hired to operate different parts of the business. Cooks, servers, cleaners, and managers are just a few of the positions that need to be filled for the restaurant to function. Though each role may require a different skill set, some enterprises hire individuals with the expectation that they will fulfill multiple roles. The labor demands of an enterprise are dependent on the restaurant model. For instance, at Roti Grill Dallas, servers would work in the prep station of the kitchen (preparing dishes) and clean floors and tables (cleaning and maintenance) but would typically have low contact with customers. Conversely, at Âme there were clear distinctions between the role of each employee as emphasized by differences in uniform and spheres of service. Here servers would only serve food and were not responsible for cleaning, cooking, or acting as a hostess.

The hiring process for ethnic restaurants requires employers to think not only about the skills of employees and their ability to perform in their role *but also the ways in which their workforce will be perceived by customers*. The latter of which differs, too, across business models. For Sabrina Nayeb, the value of a diverse workforce was both personal and strategic. She and her mother, Afifa, sought to hire with intentionality recognizing employment as a means for social capital that benefits both employers and employees. Afifa and Sabrina at 8 Cloves hired Afghan and Syrian refugees, using their enterprise as a means to help members of their

community and related communities access employment and mobility. At the opening of a French-Indian restaurant following Summer 2020's Movement for Black Lives and the commitment of many entrepreneurs, business owners, and business managers to "diversity and inclusion" led to Sabrina seeking to hire employees of color who spoke to the "diversity of Dallas."

The perception of a restaurant's workforce uniquely affects enterprises selling perceived "ethnic" foods. The perceived value of a customer's experience is impacted by their perceived authenticity of their experience. This is true for both Indians eating at Indian restaurants and non-Indians eating at Indian restaurants. As noted in earlier sections, it is not just non-Indian customers who seek out authentic Indian-food related experiences. Indians eating food from a different state or region as well as those eating their own cuisine measure value through authenticity. Therefore, the hiring of members of the ethnic community whose food is being sold has concrete impacts on a customer's perceived authenticity of their experience. While Indian restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth were once able to rely on an Indian labor force, there has been a slow deterioration of this labor supply. Pardeep Sharma and Happy Singh expressed frustration in their struggle to find Indian chefs, instead having to train Mexican and South American chefs to cook Indian food. There has been a shift from Indian chefs and servers to Mexican and Latina/o chefs and servers that is replicated across different "ethnic" restaurant enterprises, namely Chinese restaurants. Such struggles are intensified by the 2019-2021 COVID-19 pandemic which has dually increased unemployment rates and tightened the workforce, making it difficult for individuals to find work and for companies to find workers.^{xxxiv}

These trends create new racialized power structures that are facilitated through Global Capitalism. In essence, Indians since 1965 have migrated to the United States in high numbers,

to fill American economic needs, both as medical professionals and technology professionals. These two patterns of movement enable family members and community members from the homeland to then follow. These networks provide a critical mass for ethnic economies to exist in urban centers that support Indian goods and services. In these economies, there is a collapse of borders relating to ownership, labor, and cultural commodities where non-Indians can own and operate or work in enterprises that are positioned towards Indians and South Asians.

Here, Pakistanis, Afghans, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, Sri Lankans, and Bhutanese are a critical part of the enterprise's labor and customer market. Furthermore, within these enterprises, there is a demand for cheap labor. Whereas previously, these roles were filled by surplus Indian immigrant laborers, the new surplus labor market is composed of Mexican and Central American migrants who because of propinquity, their proximity to the United States, are migrating to the United States in significantly higher numbers than Indian migrants who could fill these roles. These migrants are migrating to the core of the Global Capitalist Economy because of the stale or unlivable conditions of their homeland, and as such, they are much more willing to accept work in the restaurant industry.¹⁷ The impact of the changing ethnic and racial workforce composition can be seen in the altered power dynamics which previously exemplified class differences between Indian migrants and now exacerbated bordered and racialized class differences between Indian restaurant owners, Indian employees, and Mexican and Latina/o employees.

A contributing factor to the decrease in Indian restaurant workers is the perception of the relationship between the restaurant industry, social mobility, and familial expectations. Pardeep

¹⁷ Scholars theorize that there is a professional hierarchy for surplus labor where migrants consider factors such as level of pay, working conditions (indoors or outdoors), and familiarity and community within the workplace (are there fellow ethnics who can offer support through social capital?). Within this decision-making matrix, working in the restaurant is seen as favorable by many migrant laborers.

Sharma and Happy Singh both shared that they do not want their children to follow them into the restaurant industry. For each of them, being a restaurateur has meant putting in hundreds of hours of physical and emotional labor that combines continuing innovation with operating and managing duties with responding to disruptive changes in the industry environment. Happy Singh, who is both a chef and owner, has spent entire weekends on YouTube watching cooking videos, studying recipes sent from his family in Punjab, and testing new recipes in the back kitchen. He spoke candidly of the exhaustion and intensity of his work, and like Pardeep Sharma, hopes that his children will be able to work in white-collar professional jobs as "lawyers or doctors" where they will not have to physically overextend themselves as their fathers have.

These hopes when considered in the context of succession planning, which considers the long-term management and ownership of a company, indicate that some owners of Indian restaurants do not expect their businesses to become family enterprises. Instead, these owners speak honestly about their exit from the industry post-retirement as a metric of success. In removing themselves and their families from the industry, there is an assumption that the family has been able to move *away* from these physically labor-intensive entrepreneurial pursuits and *up* in a social-professional hierarchy.

In this way, this is a misalignment between financial success metrics for the enterprise and social success metrics for the immigrant owner. Global capitalism stresses the importance of maximizing profits, exhaustive growth and has come to incorporate (and rely upon) immigrant success narratives where immigrants achieve social mobility and assimilation through their American entrepreneurial pursuits. The business and personal experiences of these restaurateurs, while fulfilling some aspects of this neoliberal prophecy, add complexity and nuance to what is

profitable for immigrant entrepreneurs and what is *desirable* with respect to growth, assimilation, and mobility.

CONCLUSION

Food is discovery. For me personally, this project has been a journey of rediscovery that has brought me closer to my family, my community, and Indian food. My interviews emphasized to me first and foremost that Indian restaurants in the United States are inseparable from the histories of South Asia. Stories from Happy Singh, whose family is from both Lahore and Amritsar, and Sabrina Nayeb, whose family is from Afghanistan, emphasize the nuances in the experiences of South Asian America with respect to cultural recreation and commercialization. Their experiences highlight that Indian restaurants express a craving from something that is comforting, familiar, and communal for peoples living in diaspora. A key theme in my research was the notion of sociability which explains how a desire for Indian food can situate an eater and a producer in a complex set of relationships involving South Asia, comfort, community, and home. Without minimizing the immense differences between South Asian identities and cuisines, I would argue that Indian restaurants, actively support a rapidly diversifying South Asian community which translates into a reimagined “Indian” restaurant industry where non-Indian South Asian cuisines can distinguish themselves and find market success. In doing so, perhaps the differences in South Asian America – differences in nationality, class, ethnicity, race, religion, and caste – can dually be recognized and celebrated.

Though, it should not be forgotten that Indian restaurants ultimately are a means of economic survival for immigrants. Candidly speaking, this is something that I lost sight of not just throughout parts of my research process but also in my regular life where I too am a consumer of ethnic goods. I emphasize this because the commodification of cultural foods should first and foremost be accepted as a necessity for survival. Even as skepticism of the rising consumer demand for “authentic” foods mounts, a globalized, capital market requires

immigrants to commodify parts of their identity. This is a process that is actively occurring in the United States and should be equally criticized and appreciated. If not for these ethnic enterprises, South Asian American would not exist as it does today.

Restaurants are significant to the cultural survival of Indian America. The recreation and innovation of food in restaurant spaces ultimately secures access to Indian food. Public access to Indian food is valuable to a number of groups. Indian Americans, non-Indian South Asians, and non-South Asian Consumers all have a vested interest in the production of Indian food, and what we must think about now, are the ways in which Indian restaurants are changing in response to political, economic, and socio-cultural trends. The conditions of global capitalism call into question the long-term survival of Indian restaurants as there is a fundamental disconnection between labor markets, metrics of success, and consumer demands.

Most notably, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the financial performance of the enterprises in my study. This can be attributed to a number of factors such as pandemic-time substitutions between ethnic foods, the heightened desirability of Indian food as a “cleansing” or “healthy” meal, and an desire for comforting curries and spices. Regardless, the expanded consumer market, is not enough to secure the future of Indian restaurants, as the relationship between migrants success metrics, surplus labor supplies, and familial expectations are different between restaurant owners and laborers.

During my site visits and interviews with restaurant owners, we spoke candidly about the shift in labor supply. The shortage of Indian laborers willing and able to work as chefs, servers, hostesses, and cleaners directly impacts the demographic composition of the workforce within Indian restaurants. The increased migration of Central American and South American has meant that the surplus labor market – defined as those documented and undocumented workers who fill

“low-skill,” low-wage positions in the agricultural and service industry – has narrowed from a broad immigrant laborer supply to immigrant laborers from Central and South America. The ethnic restaurant industry, who hires first and foremost based on price of labor often as a part of a so-called ethnic economy, has accommodated to this change by hiring Mexican and South American laborers to fill these service roles. Further complicating the survival of Indian restaurants is the antithetical relationship between South Asian notions of success and the restaurant industry.

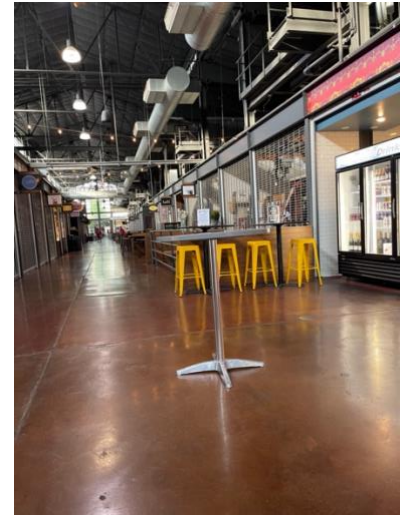
Familial expectations regarding social mobility contradict capitalism expectations of success. Pardeep Sharma and Happy Singh both shared that they do not want their children to follow them into the restaurant industry. For each of them, being a restaurateur has meant putting in hundred-hour weeks of physical and emotional labor. In removing themselves and their families from the industry, there is an assumption that the family has been able to move away from these physically labor-intensive entrepreneurial pursuits and up in a social-professional hierarchy. In this way, this is a misalignment between financial success metrics for the enterprise and social success metrics for the immigrant owner.

In spite of a changing migratory and socio-cultural movements in the United States, old and new Indian restaurant models in Dallas Fort Worth continue to not only survive but thrive. To guarantee the future of Indian restaurants, I believe, requires an intentional respect of Indian food on the part of both Indian and non-Indian eaters. Investing in its consumption and production will ensure that it is publicly produced, recreated, and innovated upon. Respect on the part of Indian, South Asians, and broader American society will translate into an industry that is desirable for owners, laborers, and customers alike. I can only hope that with time, wherever I

am in the United States, that instead of desperately craving Indian food, I will be consuming large volumes of it.

APPENDIX 1

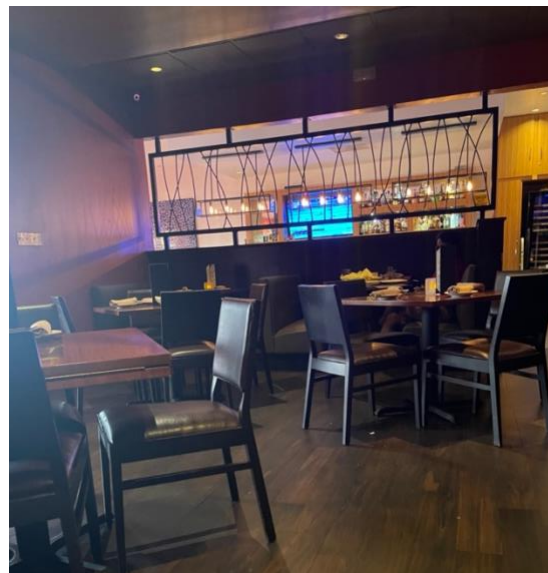
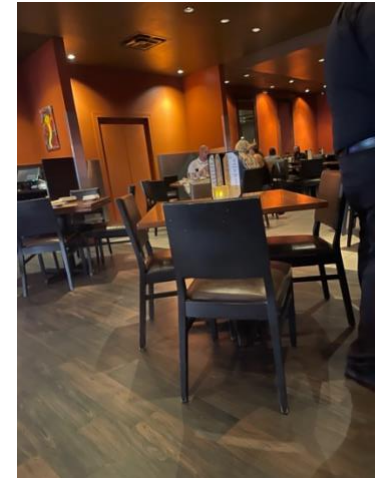
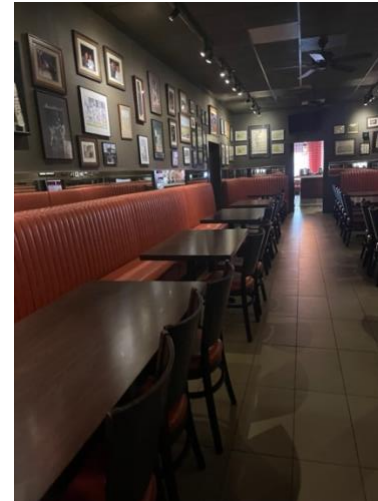
8 Cloves



8 Cloves



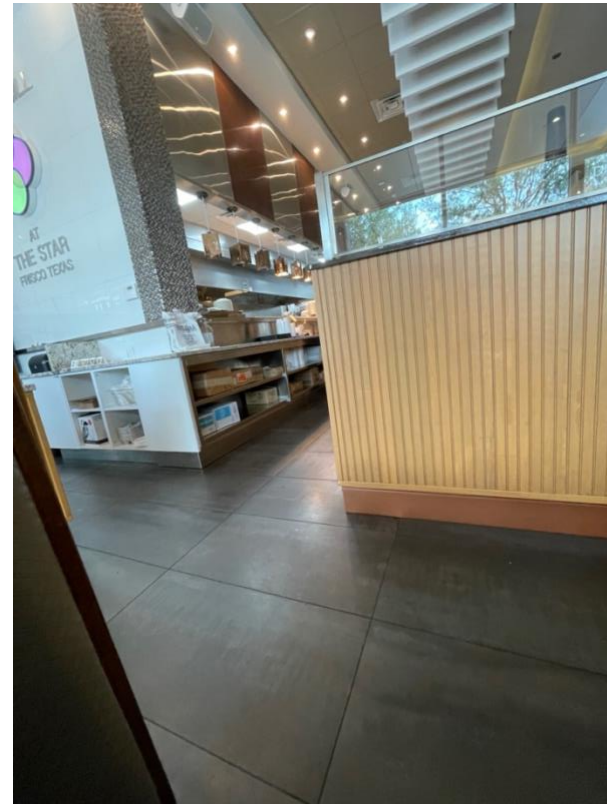
India Palace



Roti Grill Dallas



Roti Grill Frisco



Urban Tadka



APPENDIX 2

	Owner & Cuisine Description	Geographic Location Description	Interior Decor	Interior Structure	Menu Formatting	Operations
Urban Tadka	<p>Happy and Mona Singh</p> <p>Cuisine: Homestyle, Punjabi cooking; a combination of the recipes that Happy and Mona ate while growing up and new dishes that Happy experiments to create</p>	<p>City: Irving</p> <p>Neighborhood: Near several religious sites, within 10 minutes of five high traffic South Asian grocery retailers and over a dozen South Asian restaurants</p> <p>Immediate Surroundings: Located in a shopping plaza</p>	<p>Seating: Combination of booths and 4 person tables; tablecloths</p> <p>Artifacts: Happy and Mona Singh's Wedding Fulkari, white divider</p> <p>Artwork: Mirrors, framed photos of spices, framed photo of European countryside</p> <p>Colors: Yellow walls, dark wood tables, maroon and white patterned curtains</p>	<p>Floorplan: Entry room that contains a large hostess desk and a few seats for waiting; main dining hall (separated from waiting room by a door); small banquet hall or additional dining hall; kitchen; small buffet</p> <p>Kitchen: Closed kitchen with one door that opens into the dining room</p>	<p>Style: Given to each customer</p> <p>Organized by: Appetizer, Naan/Bread, Chawal/Rice, Biryani, Daal/Lentils, "From our Tandoor," Paneer, Chicken Specialties, Lamb Specialties, Fish, Meetha/Desserts, Sides</p> <p>Naming: Dishes carry a traditional Hindi and/or Punjabi name – vegetables retain their Hindi name while meats typically are in English</p> <p>Item Descriptions: Under ten words, typically describe the main vegetables/meats and the style that they are cooked as well as some description of spices</p>	<p>Model: Sit-down, full service</p> <p>Seating and Service: Diners are able to seat themselves and servers then come, set up plate ware, and bring menus to the table</p> <p>Ordering: Diners are able to order all at once or order appetizers first and entrees at a later time</p> <p>Payment: The check is brought at the end of the meal and can be paid with card or cash</p>
Roti Grill Dallas	<p>Pardeep Sharma</p> <p>Cuisine: North Indian-inspired foods; combines original, premade sauces with different meats and vegetables; similar recipes and menu from India Palace</p>	<p>City: Dallas</p> <p>Neighborhood: Knox and Henderson, Southern Methodist University campus, Financial District, NorthPark Mall, Highland Park</p> <p>Immediate Surroundings: Fast Casual Eateries, Upscale</p>	<p>Seating: Combination of booths and easy to move 2 person tables</p> <p>Artifacts: Buddha statue, Radha and Krishna statue, Plants, and greenery</p> <p>Artwork: Minimal nondescript wall art</p> <p>Colors: Hot Pink and teal walls, light gray wood furniture, light brown wood chairs, emerald, green tiling near drink</p>	<p>Floorplan: Waiting area is the line that customers wait in to order; the ordering desk is located on the side of the restaurant, the remainder of the restaurant contains booths and movable tables; drink station with fountain drinks located in back corner; restrooms; open kitchen; closed back kitchen</p>	<p>Style: Enlarged and printed on wall</p> <p>Organized by: Starters, Soups & Salads, Wraps, "Two-Step" (Choose Sauce and protein/veg); Platters (Thali); Vegetarian Favorites; Tandoori; Biryani; Bread; Sides; Dessert; Drinks; Kids</p> <p>Naming: Dishes carry a traditional Hindi name - vegetables retain their Hindi name while meats typically are in English</p> <p>Item Descriptions:</p>	<p>Model: Fast Casual eatery</p> <p>Ordering: Diners enter the restaurant, stand in line to order</p> <p>Seating and Service: Diners seat themselves, some diners were brought cups of water by servers, while others went to the drink station to fill up drinks themselves; food was brought straight from the kitchen to diners by servers; no additional service after food is served</p> <p>Payment:</p>

		Dining, High End shopping	station; bright from overhead lighting and natural lighting	Kitchen: Partially open and in the line of sight of about 70% of eaters; diners can see above the shoulders of chefs and some food preparation	Under seven words and describe the main vegetables/meats and the style that they are cooked: no description of spices	Diners pay at the front after ordering
Roti Grill Frisco	<p>Pardeep Sharma</p> <p>Cuisine: North Indian-inspired foods; combines original, premade sauces with different meats and vegetables; similar recipes and menu from India Palace</p>	<p>City: Frisco</p> <p>Neighborhood: Located in The Star off of two major highways in North DFW, Stonebriar Mall, Toyota Headquarters, FedEx Headquarters, newly expanding business headquarter district</p> <p>Immediate Surroundings: Upscale Chain Restaurants, New American Restaurants, Dallas Cowboys Practice Field</p>	<p>Seating: Combination of booths and easy to move 2 person tables</p> <p>Artifacts: Buddha status, Radha and Krishna status, Plants, and framed Sharma Cowboys Jersey</p> <p>Artwork: Abundance of wall art – large and small; scenes of Holi (photographs) blown up on back wall.</p> <p>Colors: Muted Earth Colors – browns, dark grey, light and dark woods; white walls; minimal lighting</p>	<p>Floorplan: Front ordering desk; large dining room with combination of full booths, high tables and easy to move two person tables; partially open kitchen; closed back kitchen; drink section</p> <p>Kitchen: Partially open and in the line of sight of about 40% of eaters; diners can see above the shoulders of chefs and some food preparation</p>	<p>Style: Enlarged and printed on wall</p> <p>Organized by: Starters, Soups & Salads, Wraps, “Two-Step” (Choose Sauce and protein/veg); Platters (Thali); Vegetarian Favorites; Tandoori; Biryani; Bread; Sides; Dessert; Drinks; Kids</p> <p>Naming: Dishes carry a traditional Hindi name - vegetables retain their Hindi name while meats typically are in English</p> <p>Item Descriptions: Under seven words and describe the main vegetables/meats and the style that they are cooked; no description of spices</p>	<p>Model: Fast Casual eatery</p> <p>Ordering: Diners enter the restaurant, stand in line to order</p> <p>Seating and Service: Diners seat themselves, some diners were brought cups of water by servers, while others went to the drink station to fill up drinks themselves; food was brought straight from the kitchen to diners by servers; no additional service after food is served</p> <p>Payment: Diners pay at the front after ordering</p>
8 Cloves: Spices of India	<p>Nayeb Hospitality Group</p> <p>Cuisine: North Indian-inspired foods; seemingly random assortment of dishes from taali to fusion-inspired Roti tacos to French toast</p>	<p>City: Dallas</p> <p>Neighborhood: Dallas Farmers Market, Downtown Dallas Arts District</p> <p>Immediate Surroundings: Located inside of the Dallas</p>	<p>Seating: Communal tables shared throughout the farmer’s market; Note that the seating for the section 8 Cloves was located in had yellow seating unlike other sections</p> <p>Artifacts: No noticeable artifacts</p>	<p>Floorplan: Length of vendor stand was about two and a half times the size of next-door vendors; Three drink refrigerators; shared seating</p> <p>Kitchen: Partially open and separated by glass;</p>	<p>Style: Enlarged and posted on the top of the vendor booth</p> <p>Organized by: Appetizer; Signature Meats; Biryani Selections; Signature Vegetarian & Lentils; Vegan & Vegetarian; Vegan Sides; Bread; Roti Tacos; Breakfast; Soup & Salad; Extras; Spirits; Desi Drinks</p>	<p>Model: Fast-Casual Eatery</p> <p>Ordering: Ordering is done at the vendor stand</p> <p>Seating and Service: Diners are able to eat at the shared market seating and can eat any combination of foods sold in the market; orders are picked up by diners</p>

		Farmers Market in between two clothing vendors, two vendors down from sister restaurant Laila, across from a Vietnamese vendor	Artwork: Ambiguously Oriental Designs; Painted Mandala; Painted light brown/white hands praying Vendor stand colors: Purple, pink, yellow, orange, green; minimal lighting	dining parties seated at high tables can see into the entire kitchen	Naming: Dishes are given a mixed Hindi/English name with some dishes being entirely in English; some dishes in a mix of both languages; and some dishes in Hindi Item Descriptions: Under seven-word description of meat/vegetable, a vague description of the spices or sauces used, and an explanation of the way the dish is cooked	from the booth; servers do not interact with diners beyond the booth Payment: Diners pay while ordering
Âme	Nayeb Hospitality Group Cuisine: French-Indian fusion dishes with a limited menu that combine traditional dishes from across India with some kind of non-Indian/French ingredient or cooking technique	City: Dallas Neighborhood: Bishop Arts, Irving Immediate Surroundings: Non-chain, specialty restaurants, dessert shops, bars, coffee shops, and clothing retailers	Seating: Three partial booths; several unmovable square and circular dining tables; bar Artifacts: Elephant Doorknobs Artwork: Eclectic, mismatched collection of photos of India in ornamental frames; Christian La Croix wallpaper Colors: Light pink, deep green, mustard yellow, turquoise, black, gold; medium lighting from overhead and windows	Floorplan: Diners enter into the bar of the restaurant where there is a small hostess stand; main dining room; kitchen; restrooms; Elephant Bar (separated by double doors) Kitchen: Closed Kitchen located behind the bar	Style: 1-page single menu given to diners Organized by: Brunch; Refreshments; Sharables; Grains & Lentils; Vegetables; Seafood; Meat; Breads; Dessert Naming: Dishes are fusion dishes and as such foods are not traditionally named; dishes that are not fusion typically carry their Hindi name; fusion dishes combine the fusion element into the Hindi name ("Beet Samosa; Poppy Seed Lamb Rolls") Item Descriptions:	Model: Formal, Full-Service dining Seating and Service: Diners are walked to their table by hostess where full table setting has been set up with wine glasses and plate ware; waiters wait on two to three tables at a time Ordering: Diners are asked to order their full meal at once Payment: Bill is brought at the end of the meal and can be paid by card or cash
India Palace	Pardeep Sharma Cuisine: Broadly regionalized North Indian cuisine that has an expansive menu of seemingly traditional dishes that utilize similar sauces with	City: Dallas Neighborhood: Located off three major Dallas travel routes (Lyndon B Johnson Freeway, Dallas North Tollway, Preston Road), Near	Seating: Semi-Private booths; easy to move four person tables; bar Artifacts: Bodhisattva statue; bamboo plant; very minimal lighting (dining room initially blocks out natural light) Artwork:	Floorplan: Diners enter into a waiting room with a hostess stand; small table and couch for waiting; bar; main dining hall; second dining hall with two separate doors to enter filled with cricket artifacts	Style: Multi-page menu given to diners after they are seated Organized by: Appetizers Veg/Non Veg; Soups & Salads; Fresh Indian Bread; Tandoori/Grill; Palace Recommends; Beef; Chicken; Lamb; Seafood; Vegetables; Rice & Biryani; Chutneys;	Model: Upscale, Full-Service Seating and Service: Diners are walked to their table by hostess; waiters wait on six to seven tables at a time Ordering: Diners are asked to order their full meal at once

	different types of vegetables and/or meats	<p>Galleria Dallas, Medical City Dallas Hospital, Preston Hollow, Forest Lane and Royal Lane Shopping Centers</p> <p>Immediate Surroundings: Preston Valley Shopping Plaza, Near Tex-Mex, Thai, and Brazilian Steakhouse Restaurants</p>	<p>Plain walls throughout dining room and bar; Cricket Room filled with framed jerseys, signed photos, photographs, and news clippings</p> <p>Colors: Orange, Black, Dark and Medium woods, Minimal Blue tiling in waiting area</p>	<p>Kitchen: Closed kitchen located in the back of the dining hall</p>	<p>Beverages; Children's Menu; Lunch Specials; Lunch Box To Go</p> <p>Naming: Dishes carry a traditional Hindi and/or Punjabi name – vegetables retain their Hindi name while meats typically are in English</p> <p>Item Descriptions: Descriptions are three to eight words and include the cooking technique, vegetables, meats, and vague description of spices</p>	<p>Payment: Bill is brought at the end of the meal and can be paid by card or cash</p>
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APPENDIX 3

Ethnography Things to consider

PLACE

- interior decor + layout
- location (surrounding)
- neighborhood
- exterior

TO DO:

- map
- take photos
(menu, interior, food)

BRAND // PERCEIVED

- exterior signage
- naming
- menu (language, description, number of items, drinks)
- plateware; tablecloths

ENVIRONMENT

- indian // non-indian
- family // couples // groups
- who is ordering what
- servers + hostesses
- energy and excitement
- mask policy
- languages being spoken
- is there a wait?

urban tadka (irving)

note - flower mound location merged w/ indian chili (renamed + combined menu)

Location - 11 min drive from temple; 5 min drive from Patel Brothers
- strip mall empty parking lot except for a dozen cars outside UT

interior - tile floors w/ several rows of seating (booths and tables)

- glass plates, blue napkins, stainless steel glasses

- laminated folded menu

- photos with spices; yellow walls

- punjabi music in the restaurant

people - 4 families and 1 large party celebrating a birthday; large of 17 people (punjabi)
- party of 4 (nonfam) in the party room
- party of 6 + kids (1)
- another party celebrating a birthday (13)
- 2 servers (indian women); family of 3 group of 5 men
- several small children running around; (4) 2 grandparents; (2) young couple; (2) young couple; (2) young couple
- many people picking up (ML II)

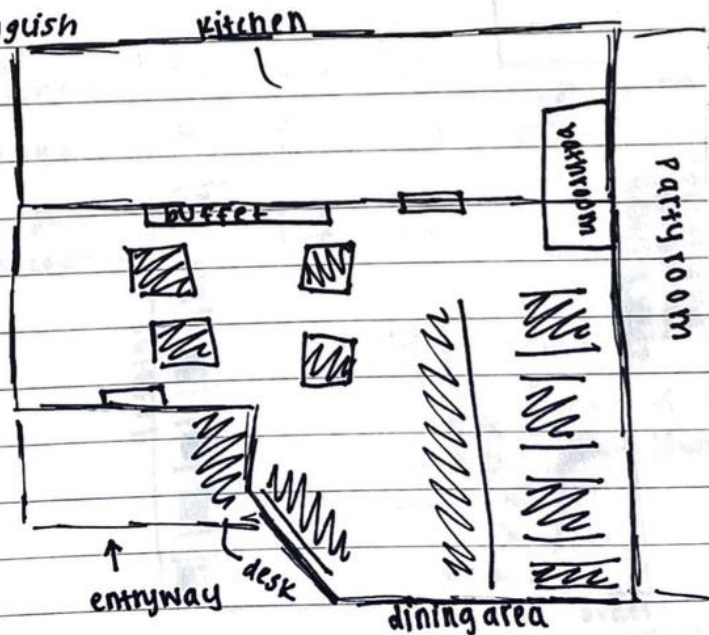
Eating - most people eating w/ hands; only one table ordered beer

- people recognizing people and families they didn't come with (friends that haven't seen each other in years)

- about half of women in S-Asian clothing

- lots of English and non-English

- Mexican cooks



Roti Grill Dallas (JULY 27 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM)

customers

- 2 white people @ booth 11:30 -
- 2 white people @ booth 11:30 - 12:10 (leftovers) ^{to-go}
- 2 white people @ booth 11:30 -
- 1 solo white person @ booth
- 2 white people @ booth 11:40 -
- 2 white people @ booth 11:40 - 12:43
- group of 3 (2 white ppl + 1 Black person)
- 1 solo person
- 1 white family (2 adults + 2 children) 11:50 - 12:30
- 2 white people 11:55
- 1 solo white person 11:55
- 2 Asian people
- 1 person - ordered the platter (brown person)

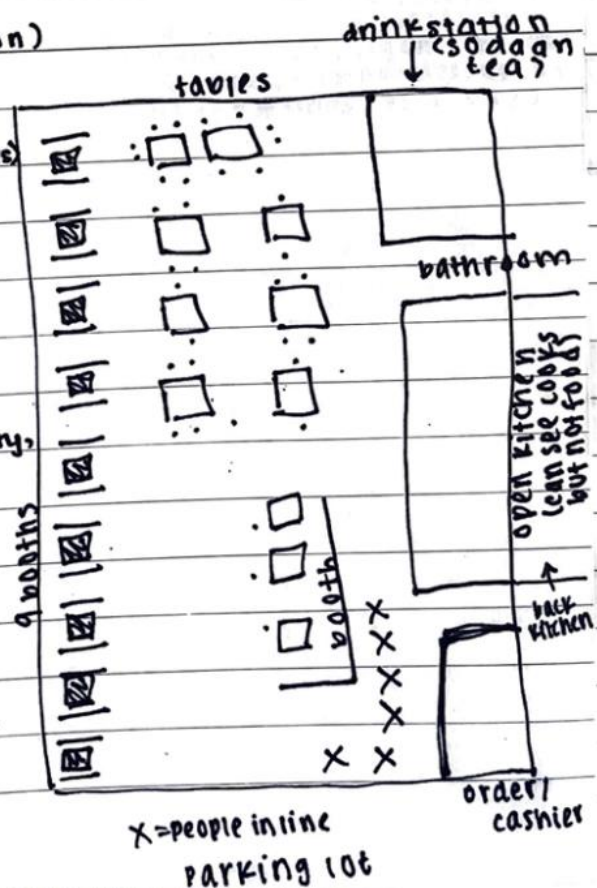
interior

- booths + easy to move tables
- very bright (huge windows and pink + blue walls)
- funky lighting
- 2 TVs in opposite corners
- some "oriental" designs: ^{ambiguos} Krishna + Leela ^{farm site} figurines
- seated Buddha in corner
- wine + beer + hard spritzers on display at cashier
- fast casual - wait in line, order, sit down and waiter brings food to customer
- music = some Bollywood, Western/country, some Spanish-inspired music
- greenery & plants

employees (all Spanish speaking)

- 4 cooks
- 2 waiters
- 1 cashier

- 2 people (nonwhite)
- 2 people (white)
- 2 people Asian
- 1 solo
- 2 people (Asian)



Food and ordering

- most people getting fountain drinks
- people who ordered wraps appear to be eating w/ hands
- on menu - regular (1 person) and Texas (2 person) servings for orders
- doordash // pickup: ~~N/A~~
- pricing relatively high for fast casual establishment (wraps ~\$9 and 1 person entree \$12 - \$14)
- most parties ordered 1 app, 2 entrees, no sharing // communal eating
 - * 1-person platter
- slowly slowing down around 12:45

menu

- Indian dish names w/ very oversimplified english descriptions
- broken into:
 - starter, soups + salads, wraps,
 - "2-step" (choose protein and sauce/gravy), platters,
 - veg favorites, biryani, bread,
 - tandoori, drink, desserts,
 - kids, *sides (pickles?)

8 CLOVES SPICES OF INDIA

JULY 27 4:30 PM -
7:30 PM

located in Dallas Farmer's Market - in between 2 clothing stores and 2 shop away from Laili; across from Banh mi / boba and popcorn shop

DFM - near Hyde Warren

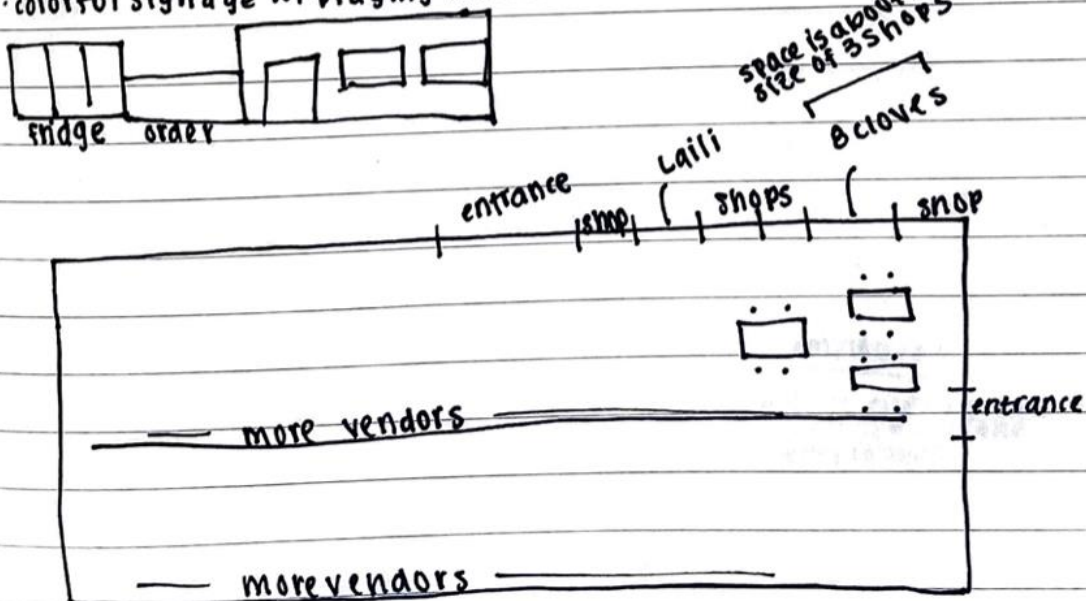
shared space w/ other vendors (3 stalls owned by Naye b)

menu

- alcoholic bev (sangria, mimosa, wines and beers)
- apps / sig meats / breakf
- language (indian / English combi of dish names w/ 4-7 word english description) - "eggplant Bharta" not "Bhangan Bharta"

interior

- order front w/ fridge section next to it (drinks, wine, mango lassi)
- open-ish kitchen (large windows)
- colorful signage w/ praying hands and "fresh indian food" written



8 CLOVES

To go: IIII IIII III

customers:

- group of 3 (ordered 2 drinks and container of food)
- group of 3 (ordered a drink)
- one white individual ordering only 2 drinks
- one white individual ordered a meal to-go
- one non-white individual ordered
- one white individual
- ~~one white individual~~
- two individuals
- one individual ordering (and bought beer)
- one individual ordered
- 2 individuals ordering (sitting at DFM @ 7pm)
- 1 individual ordering
- 2
- 1

eating // consumption

- employees said that during the week most orders are to-go // take away and on weekend people will sit in food hall and eat

employees

- article cites syrian refugees as the employees

Roti Grill Frisco July 28 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

Location - in The Star

internal - significantly more formal than Dallas location

- decor: PARDEEP cowboys jersey framed, 3 large prints of Holi/Holi at wedding ceremony, buddha statue at entrance

- much darker color palette

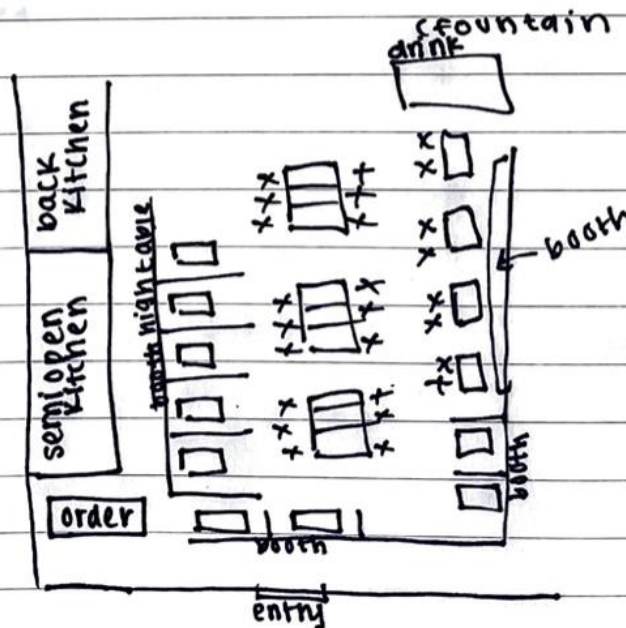
- music - classical indian instrumental (sitar)

- 2 TVs in corners

- * outdoor patio

- semi-open kitchen (again, can see individual from neck up) but view is obstructed by booths

- gray long lighting fixtures



TO GO ORACIO. III

S. Asian

Roti Grill Frisco

customers: *note* about 10-20% of the lunch hour occupancy as other restaurants in the area

- 2 individuals at booth (one S. Asian and one white) [11:15 - 12:30]
(2 curries, app, and sauces)

- 1 white individual (11:59 am -)
(curry and naan)

- 2 individuals (Indian men) [~40 min]

- 1 individual (white man) → looked at menu and left

- 2 individual (white men)

- 1 non-white individual

- 3 white individuals (men - late 20s) (one non-white)

ordering

- ~~order~~

employees

• 1 server/"hostess" - S. Asian high schooler?

• 3 cooks in exposed kitchen area

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-
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