

## **IDENTITY AND CULTURAL RESILIENCE: INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION IN THE INDIAN TELUGU DIASPORA**

**C Sheela Reddy**

Dean

Department of Political Science, Central University of Andhra Pradesh, India

**Manoja Padyala**

Assistant Professor (T&C)

Department of Management, Central University of Andhra Pradesh, India

**Malathi Gottumukkala**

Assistant Professor

Department of Management, Central University of Andhra Pradesh, India

**Mochi Rajkumar**

Assistant Professor (T&C)

Department of Management, Central University of Andhra Pradesh, India

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **Purpose**

The mushrooming growth of the Indian diaspora has generated significant academic interest in understanding how cultural values, traditions and identities are maintained across successive generations within transnational contexts. Although migration exposes diaspora communities to processes of cultural adaptation and assimilation, families remain the primary institutions for preserving cultural heritage and identity. This study aims to investigate the transmission of cultural values across generations within Indian diaspora families and the extent to which such processes contribute to cultural resilience. Specifically, the study seeks to understand: (1) the dynamics of intergenerational cultural transmission within the Indian diaspora family system, and (2) the development of a conceptual framework explaining the role of family cohesion, kinship networks and transnational cultural practices in sustaining cultural resilience and identity continuity.

#### **Research Design**

The study adopts an exploratory research design. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from diaspora studies, cultural identity theory, family systems theory and transnationalism, the paper analyses the mechanisms by which cultural values, traditions and kinship responsibilities are reproduced across generations in migrant families. The analysis is based on primary data collected through 15–20 in-depth personal interviews with Telugu-speaking diaspora members selected through convenience sampling.

#### **Expected Outcomes**

The exploratory analysis is expected to highlight how intentional parental socialisation, sustained family-level cultural practices and continued engagement with extended kinship networks facilitate intergenerational cultural transmission. The study further anticipates that family cohesion, transnational communication and participation in cultural traditions serve as important mechanisms that strengthen cultural resilience and sustain identity continuity among diaspora communities.

## Originality

By integrating theoretical insights with exploratory qualitative evidence, the study proposes a conceptual framework that links intergenerational cultural transmission to cultural resilience in transnational diaspora contexts. The paper contributes to the evolving discourse on diaspora identity formation and underscores the importance of family-based cultural practices in preserving cultural heritage across generations in an increasingly globalised world.

## Keywords

Intergenerational Cultural Transmission, Cultural Resilience, Transnational Families, Diaspora Identity, Cultural Continuity

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing global mobility of populations has led to the emergence of diverse diaspora communities that navigate complex cultural environments. In such contexts, individuals and families are required to balance the preservation of their cultural heritage with adaptation to the socio-cultural norms of host societies. These dynamics raise important questions about how cultural values, traditions and identities are sustained across generations in transnational settings.

The Indian diaspora, particularly the Telugu-speaking community, offers a significant context for examining these processes. Despite geographical dispersion, these communities continue to maintain strong cultural connections through language, religious practices, festivals and family traditions. However, cultural continuity in diaspora contexts is not automatic; it is actively shaped through interactions within families, community networks and transnational linkages.

Existing research has explored various aspects of diaspora life, including cultural transmission, identity formation, and adaptation. Studies have examined how families transmit cultural values (Bisin and Verdier, 2001), how individuals negotiate cultural identity (Hall, 1990), and how migrant communities maintain cultural distinctiveness while adapting to new environments (Berry, 1997). However, these dimensions have often been examined in isolation, limiting a comprehensive understanding of how they interact within a unified process.

In particular, there remains a need to systematically examine how family-based cultural transmission mechanisms are connected to identity continuity and cultural resilience within diaspora contexts. The role of parental influence, kinship networks, community participation and everyday cultural practices in shaping these outcomes has not been sufficiently integrated within a single analytical framework, especially in the context of the Indian diaspora.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the processes of intergenerational cultural transmission within Indian diaspora families and to understand how these processes contribute to cultural identity continuity and resilience. Specifically, the study focuses on the following objectives:

### Objectives of the Study

1. The dynamics of cultural transmission within diaspora family systems.
2. The role of family cohesion, kinship networks and cultural practices in sustaining cultural identity and resilience.

To address these objectives, the study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach and develops a conceptual framework integrating family-level antecedents, cultural transmission mechanisms and identity outcomes. By linking these dimensions within a structured model, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural continuity and resilience in diaspora contexts.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The review of literature is structured across four key thematic domains aligned with the objectives of the study: (1) diaspora and transnational identity, (2) intergenerational cultural transmission, (3) family systems and kinship networks, and (4) cultural resilience and identity continuity. This thematic structuring enables a systematic synthesis of existing scholarship and positions the present study within the broader academic discourse.

### **2.1 Diaspora, Identity and Transnationalism**

The concept of diaspora has evolved significantly from classical notions of displacement to encompass complex and fluid transnational identities (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2008). Contemporary scholarship emphasises that diaspora communities maintain multi-layered identities shaped by both homeland attachment and host society integration (Brubaker, 2005).

Hall (1990) conceptualises cultural identity as a dynamic and continuously evolving construct, shaped by historical, cultural and social contexts. This perspective has been widely applied in diaspora studies to explain how migrant communities negotiate identity across cultural boundaries. Similarly, Vertovec (2009) highlights the role of transnationalism in sustaining cross-border connections that reinforce cultural identity and belonging.

Glick Schiller et al. (1992) introduced the concept of transnational social fields, emphasising that migrants simultaneously engage with multiple socio-cultural contexts. Levitt (2001) further expands this understanding through the concept of “social remittances,” referring to the transfer of ideas, practices and identities between migrants and their home countries.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that diaspora communities actively maintain cultural practices through religious institutions, community organisations and family networks (Kurien, 2007; Kibria, 2002). These structures function as cultural anchors that sustain identity continuity across generations.

### **2.2 Intergenerational Cultural Transmission**

Intergenerational cultural transmission has been extensively studied as a key mechanism through which cultural values and practices are preserved within migrant families. Bisin and Verdier (2001) provide a foundational economic model explaining how cultural preferences are transmitted through parental socialisation.

Schönpflug (2001, 2009) conceptualises cultural transmission as a multi-generational process influenced by family interactions, social context and institutional structures. Empirical research supports this view, demonstrating that cultural beliefs and behaviours are often reproduced across generations within migrant communities.

Studies by Phinney et al. (2001) and Hughes et al. (2006) highlight the role of parental ethnic socialisation in shaping identity development among minority youth. These studies show that cultural transmission occurs through both explicit teaching and implicit modelling.

Recent longitudinal research further supports the intergenerational nature of cultural transmission. For instance, Williams et al. (2019) demonstrate that cultural socialisation practices are transmitted across three generations, reinforcing cultural continuity within families. Similarly, research on immigrant populations indicates that cultural traits such as fertility behaviour, gender norms and educational attitudes are influenced by the cultural context of the country of origin, suggesting strong intergenerational persistence of cultural values.

### **2.3 Family Systems, Kinship Networks and Cultural Transmission**

Family systems theory provides a critical framework for understanding cultural transmission within diaspora contexts. Bowen (1978) and Minuchin (1985) emphasise that family relationships are interconnected systems that shape individual behaviour and identity. Within diaspora communities, families function as primary sites of cultural reproduction. Kibria (2002) argues that immigrant families actively negotiate cultural identity through everyday interactions and practices. Similarly, Portes et al. (1999) highlight the role of family cohesion and social capital in sustaining cultural continuity.

Kinship networks extend these processes beyond the nuclear family. Research suggests that grandparents and extended family members play a significant role in transmitting cultural values and traditions (Foner, 1997; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). These networks provide additional channels for cultural reinforcement and identity formation. Studies on transnational families further emphasise the importance of maintaining cross-border relationships. Advances in communication technology have enabled diaspora families to sustain regular interaction with relatives in the homeland, thereby reinforcing cultural ties (Vertovec, 2009).

### **2.4 Cultural Resilience and Identity Continuity**

Cultural resilience has emerged as a key concept in migration and diaspora studies. Berry (1997) conceptualises resilience as the ability to balance cultural preservation with adaptation to new environments. This perspective is widely used to explain how migrant communities maintain cultural identity while integrating into host societies.

Ungar (2008) and Masten (2014) extend this understanding by framing resilience as a dynamic process shaped by social, cultural and environmental factors. In diaspora contexts, resilience is often supported by strong family ties, community networks and cultural practices.

Empirical studies demonstrate that participation in cultural traditions, language preservation and engagement with community institutions contribute to identity continuity among diaspora youth (Phinney et al., 2001; Rumbaut, 2008). These processes enable individuals to develop bicultural identities that integrate elements of both heritage and host cultures.

Recent research also highlights the role of transnational practices in sustaining cultural resilience. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) argue that cross-border interactions facilitate the continuous exchange of cultural knowledge, thereby reinforcing identity continuity.

### **2.5 Research Gap**

The literature review reveals that significant progress has been made in understanding diaspora identity, cultural transmission, and resilience. However, several gaps remain. First, existing studies often examine cultural transmission, family dynamics and resilience in isolation, without integrating them into a unified framework. Second, research on the Indian Telugu diaspora, particularly regarding intergenerational cultural transmission, remains limited. Third, there is a need for conceptual models that systematically link family-level processes, transnational practices and identity outcomes.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The present study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical foundation that integrates perspectives from cultural identity theory, social learning theory, family systems theory and transnationalism to explain the processes of intergenerational cultural transmission and cultural resilience within diaspora contexts.

### **3.1 Cultural Identity Theory**

Cultural identity theory explains how individuals construct and negotiate their sense of belonging through cultural experiences and social interactions (Hall,1990). In diaspora contexts, identity is dynamic and shaped by the interplay between heritage culture and host society influences. This perspective is central to understanding cultural identity continuity as an outcome of sustained cultural practices.

### **3.2 Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that individuals acquire behaviours, values and norms through observation and interaction. Within diaspora families, parents act as primary agents of cultural transmission by modelling cultural practices and explicitly teaching traditions, language and values. This theory explains the role of parental cultural socialisation in shaping intergenerational transmission.

### **3.3 Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) emphasises that family members are interconnected, and behaviour is influenced by relational dynamics. In diaspora contexts, family cohesion and kinship networks play a crucial role in reinforcing cultural values and sustaining cultural continuity across generations.

### **3.4 Transnationalism**

Transnationalism highlights the maintenance of cross-border connections between migrants and their homeland (Vertovec, 2009). Through communication, travel and cultural exchange, diaspora communities sustain cultural ties that reinforce identity and belonging. This theory explains the role of transnational communication and cultural participation in cultural transmission.

### **3.5 Theoretical Integration**

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive explanation of cultural transmission in diaspora contexts:

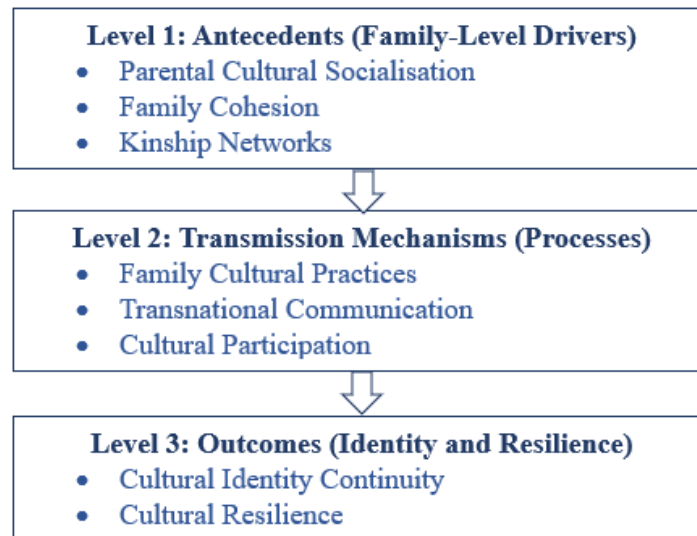
- Social learning explains how culture is transmitted
- Family systems explain where transmission occurs
- Transnationalism explains how culture is sustained across borders
- Cultural identity theory explains the outcomes of transmission

## **4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Building on the theoretical foundations, the study proposes a three-level conceptual framework that explains the process of intergenerational cultural transmission and its contribution to cultural resilience. The proposed conceptual framework illustrates the multilevel relationships among family-based antecedents, cultural transmission mechanisms, and identity outcomes, providing a structured explanation of how intergenerational cultural transmission contributes to cultural resilience in diaspora contexts.

## 4.1 Framework Structure

**Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Frame Work**



Source: Developed by the Authors

## 4.2 Conceptual Relationships

The framework proposes that:

- Antecedents influence transmission mechanisms, where parental socialisation, family cohesion and kinship networks shape cultural practices and interactions.
- Transmission mechanisms influence outcomes, where cultural engagement leads to identity continuity.
- Identity continuity further strengthens cultural resilience, representing the final outcome of sustained cultural transmission.

## 4.3 Theoretical Propositions

Based on the integrated framework, the following propositions are advanced:

### **Antecedents → Mechanisms**

**P1:** Parental cultural socialisation positively influences engagement in family cultural practices.

**P2:** Family cohesion strengthens participation in cultural practices within diaspora households.

**P3:** Kinship networks positively influence transnational communication and cultural participation.

### **Mechanisms → Outcomes**

**P4:** Family cultural practices positively contribute to cultural identity continuity.

**P5:** Transnational communication strengthens cultural identity continuity.

**P6:** Cultural participation enhances cultural resilience within diaspora communities.

### **Outcome Relationship**

**P7:** Cultural identity continuity positively influences cultural resilience.

## 5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design to examine the processes of intergenerational cultural transmission and cultural resilience within Indian diaspora families. This approach is appropriate given the study's objective of understanding the dynamics of cultural transmission and the role of family cohesion, kinship networks and transnational cultural practices in shaping identity continuity. The study integrates theoretical insights from diaspora studies, cultural identity theory, family systems theory and transnationalism with qualitative exploration to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The primary data are based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 17 Telugu-speaking diaspora members, selected through convenience sampling. The data is analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), enabling the identification of key themes related to parental cultural socialisation, family cultural practices, kinship networks, transnational communication and cultural identity continuity. This approach facilitates a systematic interpretation of cultural transmission processes within diaspora family contexts.

## 6. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This study employs a systematic thematic analysis approach to examine patterns of intergenerational cultural transmission within the Indian diaspora. The analysis follows a structured and iterative process informed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further systematised approaches to thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023). Initially, the data were familiarised through repeated reading, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and culturally significant expressions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Based on these observations, representative participant-style quotations were constructed, from which keywords were extracted to capture core meanings (Naeem et al., 2023).

Subsequently, the keywords were organised into codes, representing meaningful units of analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Through an iterative process of comparison and refinement, these codes were grouped into categories and axial themes, reflecting patterned meanings across the dataset (Creswell, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The identified themes were then interpreted in relation to existing theoretical perspectives, including social learning theory, family systems theory, transnationalism and cultural identity theory, enabling conceptual abstraction (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015).

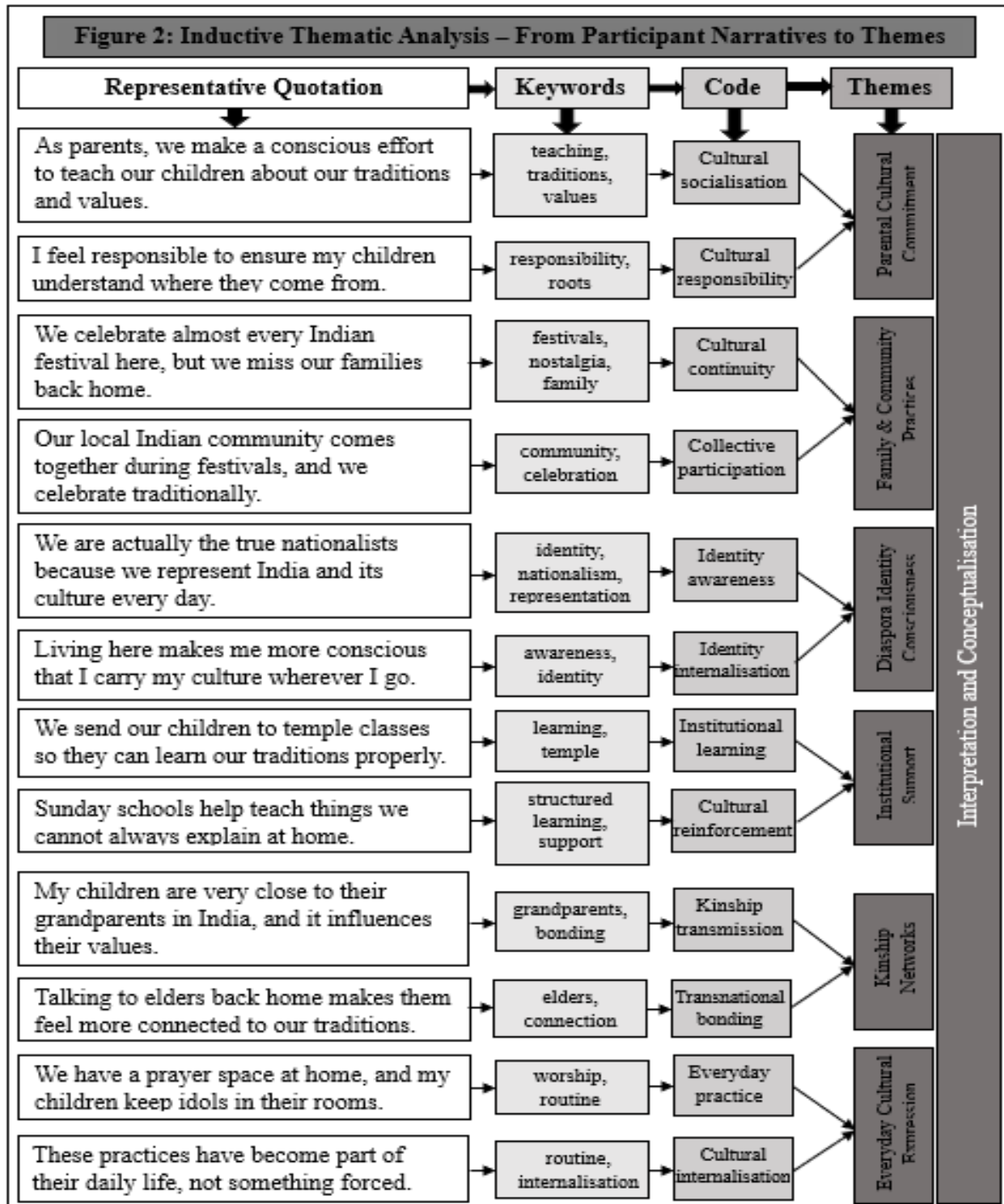
Finally, the themes were synthesised to develop a conceptual framework, illustrating the relationships between antecedents, transmission mechanisms and outcomes. This systematic progression from data to model enhances the credibility, transparency and theoretical contribution of the study (Naeem et al., 2023).

## 7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis reveals a structured and systematic process of intergenerational cultural transmission within Indian diaspora families. Following the analytical approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and extended by Naeem et al. (2023), the data were examined through successive stages of keyword extraction, coding, and theme development, culminating in conceptual abstraction.

The progression from participant narratives to thematic categories is presented in Figure 2, which demonstrates how qualitative data were organised into keywords, codes and axial themes. Building on this structured analysis, Figure 3 illustrates the inductive thematic analysis process, highlighting how empirical observations are transformed into a conceptual framework. The identified themes - including parental cultural commitment, family and community practices, diaspora identity consciousness,

institutional support, kinship networks, and everyday cultural expression - collectively represent key dimensions of cultural transmission within diaspora contexts. These themes indicate that cultural transmission is an active and socially embedded process, sustained through family interactions, community engagement and transnational connections.



Source: Developed by the Authors

Further, the theoretical grounding of these themes is presented in Table 1, which aligns the identified themes with relevant theoretical perspectives and proposed relationships. This alignment strengthens the conceptual clarity of the study by linking empirical findings with established theoretical frameworks.

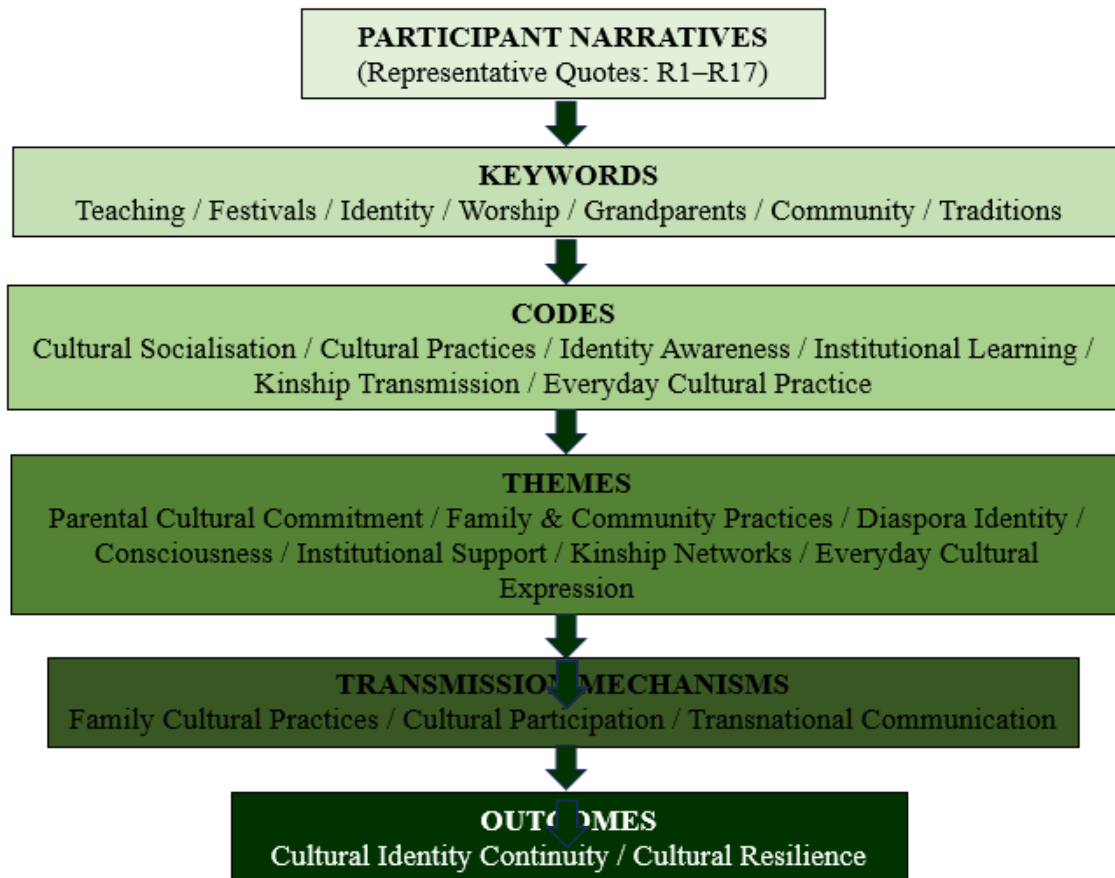
**Table 1: Theme–Theory–Proposition Alignment**

Theme	Supporting Theory	Related Proposition	Explanation
Parental Cultural Commitment	Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)	P1	Parents drive cultural learning through socialisation
Family and Community Practices	Social Remittances (Levitt, 2001)	P2	Collective practices reinforce cultural participation
Diaspora Identity Consciousness	Cultural Identity Theory (Hall, 1990)	P4	Identity is consciously constructed and maintained
Institutional Support	Diaspora & Religion Studies (Kurien, 2007)	P2 / P6	Institutions formalise and reinforce cultural learning
Kinship Networks	Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978)	P3	The extended family strengthens cultural transmission.
Everyday Cultural Expression	Identity Internalisation (Patton, 2015)	P6 / P7	Daily practices sustain identity and resilience

Source: Developed by the Authors

In Figure 3 below, these themes are integrated into a multilevel conceptual structure in which family-based antecedents influence cultural transmission mechanisms, ultimately leading to outcomes such as cultural identity continuity and cultural resilience. This systematic progression from data to conceptualisation enhances the study's analytical rigour and provides a coherent bridge between qualitative insights and theoretical development. The inductive thematic analysis process adopted in this study follows a structured, sequential progression from raw participant narratives to higher-level conceptual abstraction. The figure 3 captures the analytical movement from initial data familiarisation through the identification of key expressions, their condensation into keywords and the subsequent development of codes and thematic categories, ultimately leading to the formulation of a coherent conceptual framework that explains the processes of cultural transmission and resilience within the diaspora context.

**Figure 3: Thematic Analysis and Conceptual Model**



Source: Developed by the Authors

The figure further illustrates how these themes are integrated into a multi-level framework that links cultural transmission processes to identity continuity and resilience.

## 8. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to the literature on diaspora and cultural transmission by providing a structured understanding of how cultural values are sustained across generations within Indian diaspora families. While earlier studies have examined cultural transmission and identity formation separately, the present study brings these dimensions together within a single, integrated framework.

The findings emphasise the importance of family-based processes, particularly parental cultural socialisation, kinship networks and everyday cultural practices, in shaping cultural continuity. By linking these processes with cultural identity continuity and resilience, the study offers a multi-level perspective that connects family interactions, cultural practices and identity outcomes.

The study also highlights diaspora identity consciousness as an important dimension in which individuals actively perceive themselves as representatives of their culture. This adds to the existing literature by showing that cultural identity in diaspora contexts is not only inherited but also consciously maintained and expressed. Overall, the study provides a conceptual and empirically informed framework that can serve as a basis for future research on cultural transmission and resilience in diaspora settings.

## 9. CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Summary of the Study

The study examined intergenerational cultural transmission within Indian diaspora families and explored how these processes contribute to the continuity and resilience of cultural identity. The findings indicate that cultural transmission is a deliberate and continuous process, shaped by parental influence, family and community practices, institutional support, and transnational connections. The analysis shows that these factors work together to reinforce cultural values and enable their internalisation across generations. The presence of strong family bonds and cultural engagement plays a key role in sustaining identity, while everyday practices further strengthen cultural continuity.

### 9.2 Implications

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, it provides a clear linkage between cultural transmission, identity continuity and resilience, offering a structured way to understand these relationships. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the role of families, community networks and cultural institutions in preserving cultural identity within diaspora contexts. Organisations such as temples, cultural associations and diaspora groups can play an important role in supporting cultural learning and engagement, particularly among younger generations.

### 9.3 Future Research Directions

The study is exploratory in nature and based on qualitative insights, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research can build on this work by including larger and more diverse samples and by examining other diaspora groups for comparative insights. Further studies may also employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to test the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. In addition, exploring the role of digital platforms and evolving cultural practices can provide a deeper understanding of cultural transmission in contemporary diaspora contexts.

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