A Critical Analysis of the Life of the Bangladeshi Diasporic Women in the Website addacafe.com

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Abstract

Although the computer is the new technology, extraordinarily at a fast pace it received huge acclaim from every level of our society, since the new medium is offering very different sort of life inside the computer screen which was beyond our imagination few years back. The virtual environment which is offered by the computer mediated communication proposes new sort of relationship with the new technology. The new media assists us to modify some of our ideas about life on earth. For example, physical immediacy is no longer inevitable for friendship. This thesis paper is designed to conduct an analysis on the life of the diasporic Bangladeshi women in a website called addacafe.com. Everyday a number of Bangladeshi women visit that site. This research paper poses some research questions at the beginning. Through the answers of the questions, the diasporic women’s expectations, desires, and on the whole their daily experiences in the virtual site came out.
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1. Introduction

Although computer mediated communication is a recent invention, it has rapidly become popular. The new communication medium encompasses most of the conveniences that were previously available in the old media and more. In order to have access to the numerous possibilities of this new medium, indiscriminately, people of different social and cultural backgrounds are inclined to be connected with it. E-mailing, blogging, chatting, watching movies, and many other activities can be performed at the same time on the contemporary medium. Due to the immense popularity of this new communication medium, we encounter enormous media hype over it world wide. There are growing discussions in several periodicals and journals on how it can be used more effectively in the future. We do not know how far this technology will take us, but we do comprehend at the present time that we are able to experience a very different life on the computer, the so-called “virtual life”. The virtual environment offers us new-fangled relationships with the new technology. The multidimensional features of the new medium, which are neither utopian nor fictitious, disrupt our ideas about life on earth. Sherry Turkle, the writer of *Identity in the Age of the Internet*, describes that “most recently the computer has become even more than tool and mirror. We are able to step through the looking glass. We are learning to live in the virtual worlds. We may find ourselves alone as we navigate virtual oceans, unravel virtual mysteries, and engineer virtual skyscrapers. But increasingly, when we step through the looking glass, other people are there as well (Turkle, 1995:5).” Physical proximity is no longer mandatory in order to make new friends in the contemporary world. The website *addacafe.com*, for example, is an attractive site that offers a virtual environment for Bangladeshi males and females who are living abroad to exchange experiences and make new friends. Because of its diversified characteristics which symbolize Bangladeshi culture, many Bangladeshi people are eager to be acquainted with it, and, as a website, it has received vast acclaim from Bangladeshi people of different backgrounds. The site has encroached many diasporas’ leisure time, and has emerged as the fixed abode for many Bangladeshi people in the virtual space. To get the propinquity of the Bangladeshi culture, many Bangladeshi diasporic females who have different backgrounds go on the website on a daily basis.
In order to demonstrate the significance of this essay, I will now explore the reasons for conducting a research on the diasporic Bangladeshi females. This is quite evident that Bangladeshi females are perceived as oppressed by most researchers. Moreover, in books and periodicals, they are often portrayed as the ultimate victims of a gendered society. Bangladeshi women hardly interact with people outside their homes due to not having permission from their families to do so, and the same lack of freedom is experienced by the ones living abroad. In addition, in many families, females are not allowed to use the computer at home. Therefore, this is surprising to find out that a number of Bangladeshi females are spending several hours on the Internet everyday, since they are not supposed to be using this technology. Moreover, this is not hard to notice that the males using *addacafe* on a daily basis are students; however, I have observed that the females using the site are of diverse social classes and backgrounds. For example, some of them are working as doctors or as engineers in their offline lives, some of them are normal house wives, some females are students, few of them are divorced women living alone with their kids only. The aim of this thesis paper is to find out the lives of those women on the website called *addacafe.com*.

A number of writings have been published on different aspects of cyberculture. Beth E.Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman, the authors of *Race in Cyberspace*, discuss how race is represented in cyberspace. However, in South Asia, most researches have been done on the economic aspect of the Internet. For example, how the computer is creating job opportunities and how the computer is bringing money from abroad are the main topics of the researches. Gajjala, Radhika, the author of *South Asian Digital Diasporas and Cyberfeminist Web: Negotiating globalization, nation, gender and information technology design* focuses on the South Asian culture to demonstrate how the diasporic females are interacting in cyberspace. But instead of focusing on one specific subject, the paper looks into multiple subjects; for example, how females are interacting in cyberspace, what cyber feminism is, and how females can be benefited from using the Internet are the main topics of his paper. As a consequence, the research is not remarkably appealing to me. There is a new paper based on diasporic Bangladeshi people, *Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK: some observations on socio-cultural dynamics, religious trends and transnational politics,*
written by Dr. David Garbin, that is also based on economic issues and deals with how young diasporic Bangladeshi people are facing social and financial difficulties in the UK. In the last couple of years, a lot of writings have been published based on the emerging field of cyberculture. Different authors paid attention to different aspects of cyberculture. A number of writings have been published on how gender and race are represented in cyberspace, and on how different people are creating online communities on the Internet. But the research on the diasporic Bangladeshi female and their lives in cyberspace has been overlooked. This thesis paper aims to investigate the virtual lives of the diasporic Bangladeshi females in cyberspace.

In order to find out to what extent the research has been done in this particular field, this research paper is going to discuss Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross’s *Women & Media* in which the authors point out how cyberspace is gendered. Najmun Nahar’s research paper *Gender and Biculturalism: Ethnic Identity and Choice of Marital Partner among Second Generation Bangladeshi Women in the USA and Sweden* is a thoughtful research to find out the answer to what kind of problems the diasporic Bangladeshi females face in their real lives. David Silver’s *Blacksburgs, Virginia Electronic Village* and Victoria Bernal’s essay *Eritrea on-line: Diaspora, cyberspace, and the public sphere* focus on how race-based sites are evolving on the Internet. This part of my research paper will give the readers an overview of the contemporary researches on this particular field.

There are some significant theories concerning my research which are going to be discussed in order to compare and contrast the results. Gender theory, feminism, post-colonial feminism, virtual identity, diasporic identity, and materiality are some significant theories concerning my research that are going to be addressed in this paper. Jenny Sunden, Stuart Hall, Sherry Turkle will be paid most of the attention as theorists in my writing.

In this thesis paper, I plan to find the answers to some important research questions which will assist me to comprehend the lives of the Bangladeshi diasporic females. The questions are listed below:
What kinds of situations are the females encountering in their offline and online lives and how are they expressing their ethnic and gender identity in their online life?

How do their offline lives and online lives affect each other and how do effective their online lives to them?

What are the reasons for being a part of addacafe community?

Virtual ethnography and interview are the two methods which will be discussed elaborately later in this paper. At the end, this research paper will compare and contrast the findings with the theories.

1.1 Background

Everyday, we encounter many news articles in periodicals and journals. Some of them are persuasive and inspiring enough to make us curious to know more about the facts. The recent publicity in Bangladeshi newspapers regarding virtual life has given me fresh impetus to conduct the research on the diasporic Bangladeshi females in cyberspace. The news concerning Bangladeshi diasporas in The New Age was very conspicuous. The news was neither ridiculous nor implausible but stirring, since the same sort of news was being published in many news papers at that time. The synopsis of the news is going to be mentioned so that the readers can get the overall idea regarding the news article. In the news, we see that a large scale migration has happened in Bangladesh since 1971; around 1.5 million people from Bangladesh are living in UK, USA, Greece, Italy, Canada, and Australia. The news paid attention primarily to the Bangladeshi diaspora who were living in the UK and the USA, since the long-term Bangladeshi communities are there. In these countries, the communities are divided between Bangladeshi citizens and naturalised immigrants or second generation citizens. There are the highly skilled immigrants or naturalised students as well who have arrived recently. Countries such as Australia and Canada had similar, smaller and more recently arrived diaspora groups. Although they are living abroad, somehow they are maintaining a relationship with their home country. In the host country, they are creating their own space to maintain their own activities and preserving their culture (The New Age, 2007). The news made me inquisitive to know
how they are creating their own space and how they are preserving their own culture in foreign countries in the era of the computer-based communication. To find out the answers to these questions conclusively, the research was decided to be conducted.

In order to foster Bangladeshi culture in cyberspace, addacafe was launched in 2006 founded by some US-based Bangladeshi boys. At the beginning, addacafe emerged as a webportal, focusing on just Bangladeshi culture related activities. The chat room was incorporated afterwards to offer a virtual space for those people who are living outside of their home country, so that they could make their own communities to share their frustrations, likings, desires etc. The site has occupied many diasporas’ leisure times. In June 2010, more than 400 people confirmed their registration in the website, and more or less around hundred people among them like to spend several hours everyday to perform different activities on the site. Additionally, many Bangladeshi people visit the site as guest members everyday.

2. Theoretical rationale

Over the last decades, many researches have been accumulated on the diasporic community. Much has been said and many theories have evolved through researches on the field. This part of my thesis paper is going to address gender theory, post-colonial feminism, diasporic identity, virtual identity, the concept of community, virtual materiality, etc. Instead of guiding my research, the theories will help me compare and contrast the findings. Moreover, some significant aspects will emerge through the elaborative discussion of the theories which will assist me to evaluate my research.

2.1 Gender and Society

Gender construction plays a very important role in our contemporary society. There are some people who identify the term gender as something which is socially constructed; consequently, its implication in every aspect of our society is unavoidable. Barbara J. Risman, the author of *Gender as a social structure*, argues that gender is identified as an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of
everyday life and social organizations. Gender difference is mostly a means to justify sexual stratification. Gender is so endemic because unless we see difference, we cannot give good reason for inequality. The purpose of gender construction is to show women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group. The creation of difference is the very foundation on which inequality rests (Risman, 1994, 430-431). Through gender discrimination, the male dominant societies identify the men in the hegemonic position. Gender is a very important factor to define social roles, responsibilities, and power relationships in a family. Gender roles are socially and culturally defined beliefs about the behaviour and emotions of men and women (Anselmi and Law, 1998: 195).

Gender discrimination evidently exists in almost every aspect of Bangladeshi communities. Mead Cain, Syeda Rokeya Khanam and Shamsun Nahar, the writers of *Class, Patriarchy, and Women's Work in Bangladesh*, discuss how patriarchy is being operated in Bangladesh. They think that patriarchy as a set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women. In Bangladesh, patriarchy indicates a distribution of power and resources within families such a way that men uphold power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent on men. The foundation of patriarchy is men's control of property, income, and women's labour. The structural elements of patriarchal control are making more powerful and including aspects of the kinship system, political system, and religion (Cain, Khanam, Nahar, 1979:460). This paper was written long ago to show the scenery of Bangladeshi social condition. At the present time, this is conspicuous that gender discrimination still exists in the Bangladeshi community who are living in western countries. Najmun Nahar, the author of *Gender and Biculturalism: Ethnic Identity and Choice of Marital Partner among Second Generation Bangladeshi Women in the USA and Sweden*, states that males are regularly given more freedom to date and socialise outside of the home environment than females. Females are given gender specific chores and duties (including cleaning, disciplining younger siblings and cooking) and engaged in minimal socialization outside of the home; whereas male offspring are not obliged to participate in the family and household responsibilities. Equality between the sexes should be implemented in the household but in reality this is not happening (Nahar, 2008:14).
Gender discrimination and male domination over females is very obvious in cyberspace. Stephanie Brail, the writer of *Harassment and Free Speech in the Wild, Wild West*, describes her experience through her writing. She identified her online experience as online harassment. And she feels that creating a better environment for females in cyberspace is a complex task. In her writing she explains why this is a complex task. One day she and her boyfriend were using an online chat room called Usenet newsgroup *alt.zines*. There was another woman on there interested in talking about Riot Grrls Zines. Riot Grrls is a political and social movement of young punk post-feminists which was inspired by girls’ bands like Bikini Kill and The Breeders. But there were some men who were not interested in talking about the topic. Some of them were addressing the bands as “stupid bands”, and others were suggesting that a new girl site in Usenet should be opened. When the author started talking on behalf of the woman, she was attacked by several men, and, later on, she received several threatening mails from several people. In the writing, the author says that she was insulted in that room not only because she is a female but also she dared to speak up against them (Brail, 1996:141-145). This kind of online experience is very common for many females.

Through this thesis paper, whether the Bangladeshi females are encountering gender discrimination or not in both their online and offline lives will come out. The information will help us see what kind of life they experience in cyberspace.

2.2 Feminism and Identity

Feminism is a social movement which wants to ensure socially and politically equal right for females. Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross, the writers of *Women & Media*, write that the word feminism is used to indicate the women’s liberation movement. The main motto of this movement is to secure women’s rights, so that they can participate equally in their societies, including the possibility to enter public deliberation, institution buildings, and other processes associated with citizenship (Byerly, Ross, 2006: 3). The aim of feminist analysis is to comprehend the nature of inequality and focuses on gender discrimination, and power relations which are imposed on our culture. Many scholars of feminism pay attention to analyzing gender
inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues (Black, 1989:75).

Post-colonial feminism opposes to some ideas of feminism. Post-colonialism criticizes the material and discursive legacies of colonialism (McEwan, 2001:94). Post-colonialism shows that the contemporary ideas of feminism are the creation of the Western world which fails to see the values of other cultures. Western feminism expects that their political projects are universal. All women should be treated equally is the main motto of feminism. But different nations have different issues. Divisions of women based on nationality, race, class, religion, region, language and sexual orientation have proved more divisive within and across nations than western theorists acknowledged or anticipated. Different gender relations have given the chance to raise issues about what it means to be feminists because the western-centric point of view is no longer acceptable (McEwan, 2001:6). Gedalof says that Indian feminists consider the “intersection” as identity factors such as “sex, gender, nation and race” in constructing identity (Gedalof, 1999:28). This is evidently well known that feminism is historically always located in the dominant discourses of the west, a product of western cultural politics, and therefore reflecting western understandings of sexual politics and gender relations. Third World activists oppose to the idea of western feminism that depicts men as the primary source of oppression (McEwan, 2001:96-98). In the case of black women, men are not the single source of oppression; rather, gender oppression is inextricably bound up with ‘race’ and class. There is possibly a tendency in some of this criticism to homogenize ‘western feminism’ – socialist feminists also identify capital as a source of oppression (Delphy, 1984).

There are many people who see the computer as a tool to bring the desired liberty to females’ lives; whereas some people who do not agree with it. However, Thomas Johansson, the author of *The Transformation of Sexuality*, believes that the computer is creating an option for the females to get the desired liberty. The writer mostly pays attention to analyze Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* writing. In Haraway’s writing, she creates an ironic political myth which is the combination of postmodernism and feminism. Her writing’s core theme is the cyborg, a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism. She imagines the cyborg as a creature of social reality and a creature of fiction. She uses it as a metaphor for the political play of identity due to
the reality of new technology in post-modern time (Haraway, 1991:149). Johansson believes that due to the technologically advanced society, we can imagine a society devoid of masculinity and femininity, since the cyborg does not respect the boundary between them. He thinks that technology can show the way out of oppression and facilitate to form entirely new identities (Johansson, 2007:115-116).

In cyberspace one can represent oneself covertly as a male or female. To avoid sexual discrimination, sometimes women in the Internet may ably use male names or some names without gender relevance (Holeton, 1998:67). The individuals that we meet on the Internet are often anonymous; they have neither face nor bodies, and they do not care about appearance or gender. The complexity of face to face interactions, to some extent, does not exist in cyberspace. The new computer mediated communication offers enormous freedom which is not bound to a body (Johansson, 2007:117). I think this is a big opportunity created by the technology in the modern time. Sherry Turkle, identifies cyberspace as a rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known as the Internet which links millions of people together in new space that are changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities” (Turkle, 1995:643).

Despite living in other nations, the Bangladeshi diasporic females are continuously experiencing discrimination. In Nahar’s writing, we distinguish the ways of oppression which Bangladeshi females are facing in their own families. This research will be able to look into the problems in their families, and, furthermore, will also investigate how the computer is bringing flexibility into their lives.

2.3 Diasporic Identity and Culture

Culture is identified as one of most intrinsic aspects of our lives, and it is a part of us no matter where we live. Every nation has a distinct way of life which is driven by their host culture. There are some anthropologists who define culture as a whole way of life of a society. Every individual has a culture although they can loose it if they do not maintain it. Moreover, there is another problem that all the cultures are not equal. Stronger cultures can dominate the weaker ones (Cunningham, Sinclair, 2001:7).
Due to human mobility from one country to another through migration and other processes, cultural mixing is a reality today. A third culture has been evolved due to migration and other activities. Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair addressed it as cultural fusion which is taken place when people of one culture are negotiating with other culture (Cunningham, Sinclair, 2001:8). Stuart Hall argues that culture can not be static, pure and true to their origin, particularly in the process of diasporas. Diasporic culture, in this new perspective, is thus the product of a constantly configuring process which happens when immigrant or otherwise displaced cultures adapt to host cultures, intermingling and evolving to from a regenerative new culture, a culture which is related to both home and host cultures (Hall, 1990:43).

Due to cultural mixing, a new form of identity is emerging which Hall identifies as a hybrid identity. The new diasporas which are emerging around the world are bound to stay in at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, to negotiate and translate between them. They are basically the products of the cultures of hybridity. They carry the traces of particular cultures, traditions, languages, system of belief, texts and histories which have shaped them, but they are also bound to come to terms with and to make something new of the cultures they inhibit, without simple assimilating to them. They come into the fact that in the modern world, identity is always an open, complex and unfinished game which is always under construction (Hall, 1993:362).

When we look at the diasporic Bangladeshi people, we see that they are struggling to maintain two identities. The children of immigrant families are living in-between two cultures. In one hand they are bound to follow guidance from their parents, and on the other hand they are very much inspired by the culture of the host society in which they live. They have an inherited culture from their ancestors, and they adopt another culture from the host society. This cultural mixing brings conflicts among generations due to the reasons that some want to fit into their parents’ tradition and culture, while others wish to adopt the new culture they find themselves in. In addition, there are some people who want to accept and embrace both cultures. Often the dilemma makes them confused and perplexed. Sometimes immigrant parents wish to impose their
culture on their children. The parents are eager to see that their children are preserving their traditions and customs (Nahar, 2008:5).

In the above discussion, this is very obvious that some diasporic Bangladeshi people prefer to give ascendancy to host culture. I think this sort of leaning is really widespread among the second generation diasporic people. On the contrary, the first generation desire to have their home identity in the superior position. In addacafe, decisively, both generations are partaking conspicuously. This thesis paper will bring out some indissoluble aspects of diasporic females’ identity construction. Through the aspects, some convincing information will come out in order to comprehend how they are representing themselves on the site.

2.4 Diasporic Community and Cyberspace

In order to avoid abysmal conditions and loneliness, we coerce ourselves to be incorporated with a specific community. In the community, we find congenial environment to share our feelings to make our lives convivial. Even though diasporic communities are dispersed and living in different parts of the world, they have their own community in the host country. Due to the advent of the new communication medium, people can construct their own community in a virtual space according to their gender, class, and ethnicity. Radhika Gajjala states:

> A virtual community can be defined as a social space in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both “meet” and “face” … virtual communities [are] passage points for collections of common beliefs and practices that unite people who were physically separated’. In the case of a diasporic individual, cyberspace presents itself as an ideal site to the community building and to connect other diasporas with similar backgrounds. (Gajjala, 2003:45)

Turkle describes that the new technology brings the opportunity to build new kinds of communities, virtual communities, in which we participate from different parts of the world, people with whom we conduct our daily conversations, people with whom we may have an intimate relationship but whom we may never physically meet (Turkle, 1995:6). Alexandrova argues that “the idea about local interaction among members of
A community is altered as the modern communication technologies ensure locality not on a local but on a global scale” (Alexandrova, 2009: 486).

The questions of identity and community are intimately linked because we all try to form groups based on shared cultural identities, as well as physical proximity, and those groups, in turn, help us to shape and express our identities (Holeton, 1998:149). There are people who think that a virtual community is based on openness. Anyone can start a relationship with anyone. I think this is possible in cyberspace, but for a stable community, people pay attention on the grounds of similar wishes, interests, ideals and values (Alexandrova, 2009: 487). Gajjala describes the same idea in a bit different way that any kind of community online is based on common interests, hobbies, collaboration on projects, professional interests, and so on. These virtual communities do not necessarily connect directly to our various real life communities, or to other communities online (Gajjala, 2003:46).

There are a number of websites available on the Internet based on ethnicity and race. Cyberspace and diasporas are attention-grabbing to think about together for several reasons. One theoretical connection between diasporas and cyberspace is that of “displacement.” Cyberspace is an imaginatively constructed space. Consequently, the computer mediated space is identified convincingly as a virtual space. This is so even though computers and servers are situated in specific locations. People in diasporas have experienced displacement; they cannot completely understand themselves by reference to their present location and context. They feel out of place, and to make sense of whom they are, they must form a social context for themselves that transcends their location (Bernal, 2005:661). Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman argue that cyberspace is a place in which racial and ethnic identity can be examined, worked through, and reinforced. Cyberspace offers a powerful coalition building and progressive medium for minorities which is separated from each other by distance and other factors. David Silver’s essay on the Blacksburg, Virginia Electronic Village focuses on how community based bulletin boards and websites are restricting everybody’s participation. His study shows that how specific ethnic based design can limit the level of participation (Kolko, Nakamura, Rodman, 2000:9). In the same way, we perceive that Victoria Bernal’s essay Eritrea on-line: Diaspora, cyberspace, and the public sphere focuses on the website www.dehai.org
based on Eritreans diasporas. The site is a national space for Eritrean people who are living abroad, for the circulation of news and views about Eritrean politics. The nature of this site is to represent *dehai* as a cultural product for the Eritrean diasporas.

In this research, we will discover some reasons in order to be a part of the *addacafe* community. Through this research paper, some emancipated interests of building online communities of the Bangladeshi females will come into view.

### 2.5 Materiality and Cyberspace

This is a matter of controversy whether online interaction is material or not. The word ‘materiality’ is employed here to mean the effectiveness of online interaction. Different authors discuss life in cyberspace from their own point of view. Jenny Sunden, in her writing *Material Virtualities*, tries to prove that online interaction is not disembodied and immaterial. In her writing, she argues that the online condition is constituted through mediation between an embodied self and a textual I, simultaneously divided and intimately connected through typed enunciations (Sunden, 2003:3). From this sentence, this is completely clear that the text which is representing me and I are not the same, but we are not separated from each other as well. To demonstrate the effectiveness of the online interaction, she also mentions that “Within the loops between body and text, we always find ourselves transgressing the boundaries between textual and material in a sense that makes the distinctions blur and mingle, twist and change (Sunden, 2003:3).”

Through her writing she mostly argues that the way we represent gender in online interactions has a material value. She thinks that sex is understood as immaterial and that gender is material to specify sex. Psychological desire determines sex. Moreover, this transgression of sexuality is also another powerful dream of feminism (Sunden, 2003:53-54). Sundén convincingly demonstrates how the new medium is being effectively used by the marginalized people.

This research paper will show how material the diasporic Bangladeshi females’ online identity and life are. Furthermore, through this research, some significant features of the diasporic Bangladeshi females will come into sight to perceive how they treat their online and offline lives.
3. Methodologies

In order to congregate empirical data, two practical research methodologies, virtual ethnography and qualitative interview, are going to be employed in this thesis paper. In spite of the availability of other empirical research methodologies, those two methods are determined to be employed, since both of them are concerned with qualitative research perspective and they are the appropriate options to execute my research demands. To assess the connection of my research with the lives of diasporic females, empirical data will assist me impeccably. We will be able to see a new kind of life driven by new technology through assessing the connection. Grint and Woolgar discuss how methodologies can assist us to conduct researches on the new medium. In their writing, they state that by the methods, we will examine our attitudes towards technology, our conception of what technology can and can not do, and our expectations and assumptions about the possibilities of technological changes. We will provide a critical exploration of the new computer mediated technology, so that we can understand the possibilities and the new dimensions of the Internet (Grint and Woolgar, 1997:6). Through my research, this thesis paper will not only find out our new relations with the new technology, but also other characteristics of the technology which will assist us to explore the lives of diasporic females. This is not a scientific research paper that will test the theory to provide a solid foundation for people in the future. Rather, this thesis paper will seamlessly bring out the answers to the questions stated in the introduction, which will assist us to evaluate the lives of the diasporic women in cyberspace.

3.1 Virtual Ethnography

The website *addacafe* is the alluring paradigm of a Bangladeshi webportal that offers user friendly services that prevail in every aspect of the website. Stay connected and being at home are the two slogans which the virtual space proffers for anyone. The whole site is designed for business purpose. Some spaces on the website are available for commercial advertisements, which are regarded as the main source of income of
the webportal. The website consists of several forums that have many sub-forums. Entirety nine accessible links are available on the home page which is under the supervision of an administrator.

To conduct the research onto the computer mediated space, virtual ethnography is decided as the first method in this paper. Virtual ethnography is the extension of the research method ethnography. Both of them are intimately linked and will be discussed in the following part of this paper. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, the writers of *Ethnography: principles in practice 3rd ed.* define the term ethnography in the very elaborate way. The term ‘ethnography’ was first used in the nineteenth century in Western anthropology, where ethnography was considered as the descriptive account of a community or culture which was located outside of the West. At that time, ethnography was seen as an analytical tool to analyze non-western societies and culture. Ethnography was identified as the core of anthropological work. At the beginning, it was ideally practiced by travellers and missionaries. Over time, it became popular, since the anthropologies started using this concept in their field work to investigate and interpret the specific social organization and culture. In the twentieth century, researchers were using this method very broadly to investigate any society which was different from one’s own. Fieldwork is the main part of this empirical method. Fieldwork requires a period of time living, may be couple of months or more than a year, in order to interpret the distinct way of life, social values etc (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 6-7). Through the fieldwork, the distinctive nature of a particular society comes out. In this way, the ethnographic approach becomes a way of studying the achievements of a meaningful cultural context for the participants. Ethnography is considered a way of seeing through the participants’ eyes: a grounded approach which aims to a deep understanding of the cultural foundations of the group (Hine, 2000: 21).

Ethnography has been changed a lot since its origin. At the beginning, anthropologists used this method to develop an understanding of cultures in distant places. Nowadays, it has been taken up with a wide range of fields, including urban life, media, classroom, science and technology. Although it has some special status as the key anthropological approach, this approach has been used in sociology and culture studies as well. Instead of studying all ways of life, ethnographers, in sociology and
culture studies are interested in conducting research in a more limited aspect, such as people as student, as television viewers or as professionals. At the present time, ethnography is not only used to analyze different cultures; rather it is used in our own culture to see what kinds of exotic ways of life come out. In this way, the ethnographers are throwing challenges against what has been taken for granted about their own culture (Hine, 2000:41).

In order to conduct the research on the website, this paper selected virtual ethnography as the proper choice, which is considered as an ideal methodological starting point for such a study. It could be used to find out the complex link between new culture and new technology. The ethnography of the Internet looks into the ways in which the technology is experienced in use. Virtual ethnography helps us to see the Internet as a culture and assists us to see how the new technology is handled by people (Hine, 2000:31). The multi dimensional features of the Internet fundamentally represent the cyberspace as a place for ethnographic research.

The basic form of ethnography consist of a researcher spending a long period of time immersed in a field setting, taking account of the relationships, activities and understanding of those in the setting and participating in those processes. The aim is to open up a window through which a specific group of people’s life will be exhibited (Hine, 2000:33). In order to properly operate the method in my research, at first, I decided to go to the website everyday first seven to eight months. The nature of Bangladeshi females has to be contextualized in this stage in order to state the reason behind taking such a long time for this research. Due to living in a culture surrounded by religious beliefs, most Bangladeshi females are conservative. They do not easily make friendship and share their personal life with other people. The time that I took played very important role in order to create my engagement with the particular field and to make a relationship with the females on the site, which is considered important for ethnographers as well, which helped me to cover interviews later on. The engagement of ethnographers with the everyday life of the inhabitants of a field site is very important, since through this process, special kind of knowledge about the community will emerge. Through this knowledge, we will be able to judge how close or different they are from our own thinking. This kind of engagement helps us to see a new dimension which comes out through the exploration of the use of the medium in
context. Ethnographers’ engagement is a valuable source of insight. Through the interaction with the new technology, ethnographers bring out the ideal informant's of the new technology (Hine, 2000:63).

The role of the ethnographer is to inhibit a world in which he/she can be identified simultaneously as a stranger and a native. The ethnographers must be very close enough to the culture which is being studied by them, so that they can report on it in details (Hine: 2000:35). This paper took all initiatives discussed above to observe the life of the specific group of people in cyberspace. At the beginning, I started going there as a stranger. The word ‘larker’ can be a good adjective to define my first identity there. None knew who I was. Regular members were not even interested in spending time with me, since I was a stranger to them. In the first few weeks, I was observing everything as an outsider and as a larker but intended to study everything as an insider as well. To become a part of the community, I started to perform some activities, posting messages and pictures in the forums, going to the public chat space everyday, etc. My attitudes were very discreet so that the people could not know my identity as the researcher. Otherwise, the whole efforts would be in vain. These sorts of initiatives made me an acceptable person to the community quickly. Within a short time, I was able to make the regular members responsive to me. Simultaneously, I was observing and participating, as a native and as stranger, in the mediated space to comprehend the natures of the activities there. Through this process, we can gather important data which will be helpful for our research (Hine, 2000:63-64). After spending a long period of time, now, I can consider myself a person who is well-experienced, to some extent, about people. The long time I spent on the site gave me the opportunity to make friends with some females in the space, which played an effective role in covering the interviews in this research. At this moment, I can not consider myself as a stranger to them anymore; rather I am a regular user there.

There are some problems in using virtual methodology as the research method in online research. In the discussion above, this is easily noticeable conclusively that the major task of ethnographic research is field work to analyze a specific culture. In order to do so, ethnographers like to visit the ethnographic fields physically. For the
case of this research, this thesis paper performed the same practice but in the virtual space. To conduct virtual ethnography is a complex task, especially to access online people. The traditional mode of physically being there to conduct field work is absent here. And there are some anthropologists who think that physical proximity with the culture, which is being studied, is very important for conducting field work, but in the computer mediated space this important aspect is absent. So there is a question of effectiveness of virtual ethnography as the method (Hine, 2000:36). During conducting the research, I was experiencing the same problems stated above. The first problem was to access to the females who were partaking everyday in that site. Due to not having physical proximity, I was considered as a stranger for many months. Consequently, the female were not giving me any possibility to become a part of the group. To overcome the problems, I spent a lot of time there, so that I could present myself there as a part of the group.

3.2 Qualitative Interviews

In this part of this thesis paper, qualitative interview was selected as the method of research due to have been identified as an important method to collect empirical data. The qualitative research method is considered the second method of research in this research paper. Virtual ethnography does not illustrate any guidelines for how the field work is going to be done. So during the field work, data was gathered in a scattered way. During field works, many questions were evolved which could not be answered through field works only. Qualitative interviews and ethnography complemented each other to find out answers of those questions which could not be answered by only ethnography. By operating the method properly, this paper disclosed some answers connected to the research questions. Today, interviewing is considered as the most popular way of generating information. In our present society, mass media, the human service providers, and researchers increasingly generate data by interviewing. Regarding the methodical forms of information, it has been estimated that ninety percent of all social science investigations use interviews in one way or another. Interviewing is identified as very effective technique which is undoubtedly the most widely used technique for conducting systematic social inquiry, as administrators, politicians, psychologists, anthropologies, and pollsters consider interviews as their “window on the world” (Silverman, 2006: 140). Qualitative
interviews are special kinds of conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researchers try to find out details about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion. In survey research, the same questions are asked to each individual. So this is hard to find out the details concerning the research thorough this process. But in qualitative interview, each conversation is unique. Researchers go with their questions to discover what each interviewee knows and is willing to share (Rubins, 2005: 4).

In order to uncover people’s experiences, interview is the constructive methodology which can bring out the data implicitly. There are some activities which can not be performed explicitly; therefore, virtual ethnography is not capable to distinguish them. To find out their experiences, qualitative interview was introduced in this research as the second method. At the beginning, fifteen females were selected for the interviews. The interviewees were categorized in accordance with their age, professions, and marital status. To convince the females for the interview was the complicated part of this research, since they were not acquainted with it and could not trust me as a reliable person. A long period of time was invested, as mentioned above, to convince them to do it. At the end of the interview session, five interviews were discarded due to not having enough data. So the interview part was comprised of data attained from ten interviews. BD_girl, Bd_girl_london, Titly, Juthy, Neha, Ratri, Rose_bd, Tithi_us, Nil, Pori were swayed to face the interviews. Bd_girl and Ratri were single mothers, age above thirty, living in North America. Titly was a working class woman around thirty-six years old dwelling in Finland. Juthi was a student, age above twenty, single girl, doing her bachelor’s degree in Sweden. Neha was from the USA, studying in high school. Rose was a twenty-six year-old married female living with her husband in the USA. Tithi was single, twenty-four year-old doing master’s in the USA. Bd_girl_london, Nil, Pori were teenagers, studying at high schools in the UK. The girls who are in high school are second generation diasporic females born and grown up in the UK, and rest of them are first generation. The females were categorised to perceive how females of different ages and professions were interacting with the Internet, and what the main purposes for using it were. To conceal their real names, their online names were published in this research, since it was the foremost condition from most of them. In spite of the availability of many media to demeanour the
interviews, *yahoo* was preferred to cover the interviews. Instead of conversation, text chat was their conspicuous selection. Text based chatting brings one sort of invisibility which the interviewees were stipulating at that time. As a researcher on the website, I was incapable to say them no. Every interview was covered on *yahoo* except one which was done in *addcafe* chat site. *Yahoo* performed outstanding for both long distance and short distance interviews. Due to its free available chat option, using *yahoo* was expedient to all of us. And every conversation was saved in Microsoft Word file as the proof of the future reference. There was no alternative option without saving them in Word file.

Effectiveness of interviews relies on efficient questionnaires. This is the most intricate part of the interview session to organize interview questions. There are some procedures which should be followed to make productive interviews. The authors of *Qualitative Interviewing* divide the interview into two parts, ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’. This is a good way to conduct the qualitative research. In the primary interview part, at the beginning, some really general questions are asked to make the conversation flexible. In the second phase, researchers initiate asking interviewees a group of introductory questions about what people have learned through their experiences. Mostly, the subjects which are connected to the researches are focused in the second segment. Secondary interviews are designed differently from primary interviews (Rubins, 2005: 6). In this thesis paper, I followed the same structure suggested by Rubins. My interviews were divided by two parts: ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’. Primarily, there were total seventeen questions selected for the interviews which are mentioned at the appendix of this paper. Among them, first eight could be considered very general questions designed for primary conversations. Rest of the questions were the topic based related to the research. In the primary part, the interviewees were asked some common questions regarding their present life and families. Through these kinds of introductory conversations, I entered slowly into the secondary questions. The primary conversations, such as “hi”, “hello”, and “tell me something about your family”, which were some examples of the introductory questions, removed the invisible boundaries between the interviewer and the interviewees which were noticed decisively during my interview sessions.
This is important to know life histories because they reveal information about what shaped the value and ambitions of the people. Life histories are very general kind of discussion which should be discussed at the beginning of the interviews. And these things should be discussed under the primary interviews part, since these kinds of histories are considered as the part of our life that we experience through our culture. In this part, individuals are asked to provide a narrative about the stages of their life, their childhood, educations, jobs, marriages and divorces, children, illnesses, and other crises they have weathered, as well as good times. Life histories help the researcher to know about the way people live. Through life histories, we can encounter some intrinsic frustrations which people are experiencing in their everyday life (Rubins, 2005: 8). I mentioned earlier that ten people attended in the qualitative interviewing part. At the beginning of the conversation, I asked them some questions related to their life histories which assisted them to be comfortable and bring some important aspects of their lives. Those aspects helped me understand the reasons as to why they were on the website. For example, “how are you”, “what about your family”, “tell me something about your family”, and questions regarding their marriage life and their relationship with parents were some questions almost everybody was asked in my interviewing session.

In the second part, the researchers formulate a lot of follow-up questions to make sure that they are proceeding according to their target. Researchers play a more active role in the second part than in first part. Second segment is a special sort of study which explores what, when, how, why, or with what consequences something happened (Rubins, 2005: 12). Why do you use the Internet? How did you know about addacafe? What do you do there? Did you ever face sexual harassment? These are some examples of some of questions which were asked to every interviewee in this session. The secondary interview part was designed to seek explanation for any kind of puzzling situation in a specific time and place. The main goal of that part was to bring out a coherent explanation by aggregating all the information that different people have shared, while recognizing that each person might have his or her own construction of events (Rubins, 2005: 14).
This is the intricate process to seek what is authentic and what is not on the internet because the virtual place is different from the real. Hine argues that the new technology introduces fundamental problems for judgment of what is and is not authentic. Visual anonymity helps people deliberately to play with their identities and adopt different personae. There is no guarantee that the identities they present in cyberspace will mirror who they are in their offline life. Some people like to represent themselves differently in different places. The opportunity to play with identities is welcomed, and there is no liability for a person to represent themselves in cyberspace as a person driven by the offline identity (Hine, 2000: 118-119). Hine’s argument is convincing enough which helped me interpret my experiences on the website. Everyday we encounter many people in the Internet without knowing their offline identities even though this is not mandatory to know someone’s offline identity. However, we endeavoured to make sure with whom we were communicating, so that we could be sure that we were talking to the right person. This kind of attempt was regarded as the very natural instinct of human life. Playing with identities is a frequently happening phenomenon in online life. During my research, I met some boys in addacafe who were representing themselves at the beginning as girls. After having long a conversation with me, at the end, they just left a message “hey, fool, I am a boy.” Similarly, Bd_girl and Ratri answered me three different things regarding their marital status and age in three different times. First time, both of them were representing themselves as 24 to 26 year-old girls studying in North-America. In the second time, they said that they were thirty plus, married women. Third time, they portrayed themselves as thirty plus single mothers. I was confused and treating them as two different females. Then I thought that Bd_girl and Ratri could be the same female playing a trick on me. Later on, they gave me the opportunity to have a friendly phone conversation with them, which helped at least to recognize them as two different people. However, I am still surrounded by confusion regarding their identities and what they have articulated regarding their age, marital status, etc. Ethnographers like to travel to a place to conduct ethnographic research in situ. That kind of travelling indicates that face-to-face interaction is very important for ethnographers. Before the wide spread availability of CMC, mediated communication was not considered interactive enough to bring the taste of face-to-face conversation. So to conduct ethnographic research, the basic demand of the ethnographers was absent completely. But due to the wide spread use of computer mediated
communication with latest technological facilities, such as web cam, voice chatting facility, the ethnographic research in the virtual space is not that questionable nowadays (Hine, 2000: 43-44). Face to face conversation was absent in my interview sessions. Consequently, I am not sure whether the data that I achieved from them through the interviews are true or not, although this is not part of my studies. The crisis of authenticity is the focal factor prevailing everywhere in cyberspace. This is not possible for a person to identify with whom they are chatting, since everything is mediated. Everyday I conducted my conversation with many girls on that site without being sure whether they really exist in the real world or not, which is the fun part of online life.

4. Results

The outcome of the research is going to be discussed in the following parts of this paper. While conducting virtual ethnography, many of the activities of the female members were observed. This kind of research assisted me to perceive different aspects of the website. Moreover, the results also facilitated the evaluation of cyberlife which is being experienced by Bangladeshi females. A lot of data was gathered through the virtual ethnography methodology. And the qualitative interview method assisted me to ask the women regarding their experiences, which could not be observed through virtual ethnography.

4.1 Field Observations

Virtual ethnography has been operated in this research in order to congregate the data from the field level. My field observation has been conducted sometimes as a larker and sometimes as an active participant as I mentioned above. Most of the important data which are connected with my research are discussed below.

4.1.1 The Small Bangladesh in the Computer
The primary intention of the creators of addacafe was to represent a small Bangladesh for those who were seeking South Asian culture inside the computer mediated space. To make the site acceptable to the diasporas, the name addacafe was given which unambiguously demonstrate the conclusive connection with Bangladeshi culture. Through the combination of the words, ‘adda’ and ‘cafe’, the space created one sort of illusion which signified a popular hangout place. The name gave the impression of one sort of social activity, gathering of friends, sitting together and having fun. The word ‘cafe’ comes from French and explicitly denotes a coffeehouse, or a restaurant, and, sometimes, it may refer to a room in a hotel or restaurant where coffee and liquors are served. So putting together the two words gives us the feeling of a congregation of friends in a coffee shop. Instead of serving real coffee and drinks, only the illusion of the feeling is served in this virtual place. Its main objective is to entertain people. Moreover, the name gives us the impression of a space in which social interaction takes place. Once upon a time, CMC or the Internet was considered as the technology only, but now it is more than that. Nowadays, technology is regarded as the engine of social relations. The Internet is the place in which social relations occur, and technology is what individuals use to enter that space. It is such a space in which relations occur, and the people maintain those relationships (Jones, 1995: 16).

There are many persuasive features offered in the site to establish it as a virtual place inspired by Bangladeshi culture. At the primary stage of my research, I intended to study the foremost context of the space. To find out the context, the home page was scrutinized to see what were the main elements constructing the whole space. The slogan “The complete Bengali entertainment portal” written on the top of the home page compellingly stipulated the website as the space devised to celebrate Bangladeshi culture. Explicit presence of the decorative links, on the home page, could instigate anyone to drift into the realm of Bangladeshi drama, music, mp3 on the site. The discussion forum based on diversified subjects was accessible to join. From the home page, anyone could be connected either in voice chat or in the text based chat zone to spend time. In order to assist the users to be informed regarding the contemporary issues which were taking place in Bangladesh, there was a link offered in the home page, through which every Bangladeshi national newspaper could be read. There was an upload option that the users could use to upload videos, music,
mp3, etc. Moreover, due to the uploading options, every kind of contemporary Bangladeshi hit music, hit movie, hit television drama were available and did not cost anything to be downloaded. Webcam was allowed to be used in the chat zone as well. Preserving Bangladeshi culture on the Internet was the main milieu of the website.

Figure 1: Home page of addacafe

4.1.2 The Names and the Ethnicity

Diversification in terms of selecting nick names is common custom of the registered members in the site. The nicks were manufactured in attention-grabbing ways that manifestly depicts their correlation with the specific ethnicity. There was a common trend which was noticed carefully that predominantly, the people who went to the space everyday were interested to be attached with Bengali community. So they took some names into their consideration that deliberately represented themselves as the people of the Bengali ethnicity. For example, there was a girl who used the nick name called BD_Girl; by paying a little attention to the name anyone could understand that BD was short for Bangladesh, and the whole name indicated that she was a girl from Bangladesh. There was another girl who used the nick bd_girl_london. The name unequivocally indicated that she was a girl from Bangladesh and right now living in
London. There were some other names which were available in the space that unambiguously represented Bangladeshi culture. For example, there was a regular user name ‘Ratri’, which meant ‘Night’, and this is a very popular female name in Bangladesh. In most cases, people used nicks which were not being used in their offline identity. There were some weird usernames on the site, which undoubtedly indicated confusion. It was hard to identify gender through them, such as ‘guest243’ or ‘sweetsunshine’. This kind of nicks did not hold any kind of gender involvement. So this was one sort of bewilderment trying to find out who was behind the names; nevertheless, the site offered us one way to find out. If someone just places the cursor on the nicks then the gender selection is easily viewable. There is no naming convention written in the terms and conditions section of the site, so people are selecting their names impulsively.

Figure2: nick names of the users and the gender of the nick.

### 4.1.3 Deconstruction of the Languages

Expressions of feelings are articulated in the chat space through writing. In the virtual space, Bengali language was given higher priority instead of English to convey feelings. This trend was overtly manifested in the common chat room on the whole. The chat room simultaneously offered private chat and public chat options for its users. In the private chat room, both languages were receiving preference for conversation, but the second generation people were more fanatical than the first generation to use English as the communicative language. The second generation members were articulating their expressions on the website in very dissimilar ways which were inflexible to decipher their demeanours. Every conversation was presented in very diminutive ways which appeared to me as something coded. I nearly
demented with worries when I saw the wired ways of communications at the beginning. Gradually, my everyday run through the medium made me proficient to comprehend them. To welcome someone, instead of writing the whole word, just ‘wc’ was used. In order to describe ‘take care’ and ‘how are you’, just couple of letters, ‘tc’ and ‘h r u’, were used generally. In the case of writing something in Bengali, the same diminutive ways was performed. In the following picture, there is a sentence “harry bhalo” which is written in Bengali does not mean anything as long as the whole sentence is not scrutinized. To express the whole situation, it should be written “harry tumi kemon acho”. The shortcut ways were aspired intentions to express feelings on the website.

4.1.4 Surveillance over the chat room

The virtual place proffers a space in which personal relationships occur. This place emerged as a sort of interesting virtual space, like many other places in our real life, where boys and girls met together, which offered rooms for developing personal relationships with other people. Users were very convivial and eager to talk most of the times. There was a personal chat option where anyone could conduct personal conversation although mostly girls did not show interests to talk there. They were willingly interested to conduct conversations in the public chat room. There was one more common inclination which was noticed carefully that people preferred yahoo or msn in order to do online dating instead of addacafe; otherwise, they would get blocked by the administrator.
4.1.5 The Place for Egalitarianism

Much has been discussed concerning gender discrimination in virtual spaces, although this problem has not been found explicitly practiced in addacafe. This will be a matter of controversy if I assert that the website is devoid of gender discrimination. Rather, I want to state that while conducting the field observation, no sign of gendered activities was observed, implicitly or explicitly. This thing might be practiced covertly through private chat option which could not be seen straightforwardly. In addition, I also noticed that the administrator interrupts the conversation when someone makes use of slang or disturb others. Boys and girls participated equally in the discussion forums to debate contemporary issues. Whenever something happened, they raised those things into the common chat room, refuted it, and came up with some further comments, which were the commonly happening phenomena on the site. They had many topics to discuss everyday. While conducting my research, one day, there was a discussion based on Las Vegas. Who wanted to go there and what were the possible explanations to go there was the main discussion topic in the chat room. I observed that both boys and girls were commenting on it without interrupting each other.
4.2 Qualitative Interviews

To congregate the information of the personal experiences, the interview method has been operated in this research. Through this procedure, some experiences which could not be seen through field observations came out. In the interview sessions, many aspects of diasporic lives have been discussed, but this is not possible to discuss all of them in the following parts. Some information related to my research is discussed below.

4.2.1 Home Environment

There is a research question which has been posed in the introduction about the life of the females inside their home. To find out the answers of this question, I started talking to the interviewees about their families at the beginning. Through asking different questions, I slowly entered the basic questions that whether they were facing any gender discrimination in their families or not. To answer this question, most of the females, especially the women who were not married answered that they were not facing any kind of gender discrimination, rather experiencing desired amount of liberty inside their homes. But the experiences of the divorced women were very different. Most of the times, we perceived that they encountered a lot of problems in their personal life which emerged very evidently through the interviews. For example, bd_major and Ratri encountered a lot of problems with their husband in their conjugal life. Sometimes they had to tolerate physical torture. As a consequence, they decided not to be with their husbands anymore.

4.2.2 The Place for Making Friendships and Avoiding Loneliness

In order to avoid loneliness and frustration, many people went to the site everyday. Some people were constantly available there no matter what time it was. There were some people who were facing problems in their single life, especially Bd_Girl, Ratri, and tithifinish. In their single life, they were facing enormous problems; especially loneliness was specifically mentionable among them for being alone in foreign
countries. Detachment from their own culture was another vital reason which imported loneliness into their lives. This is considered a common problem among many diasporic people which came out through the interviews. So to avoid loneliness and to stay connected with their own culture, they started to go on the site everyday as they mentioned in their conversation with me. They also mentioned that being there was not only for fun; rather this was an aspiration to be in contact with their own culture. The space was seen as something that existed in the real world, and when they were communicated with someone, they got the feeling of talking to someone in the real world. But this was also factual that some people went there everyday for fun only. We can consider the case of Rose and rest of the females who were not married and not facing that much problem in their families went to the space regularly for fun and never took the cyberlife seriously. In the interviews, there were many respondents like Rose, and they answered in the same way as Rose. They thought that they were not facing gender discrimination in their homes and they did not have mentionable traumas in their life; consequently, they went to the website for fun and never considered it as a part of their life. So, from my research, something that emerged is that cyberlife is taken seriously by those who are not happy in their offline life.

4.2.3 Gender Discrimination in Cyberspace

Sexual harassment is a common problem which is most of the women are experiencing in every aspect of their social life. And in my interviews, most of the respondents asserted that more or less they faced sexual harassment on the site but this was avoidable. Either by complaining to the admin or not responding the private chat option the problem could be evaded. I was quite sure that the females of that site more or less were encountering this problem, but the interviewees made me sure about how the place was offering a new prospect for females.

4.2.4 The Concept of Community

Bangladeshi culture is the highest priority to Bangladeshi people when it comes to forming a community. To be a part of a specific community in a foreign country where few Bangladeshi people live is an intrinsic process. But living within their culture and interacting with their own country people is a compulsion that most of the
Bangladeshi diasporas always keep in mind. To accomplish their psychological yearning, they go to *addacafe* where they can meet their own country people and stay around Bangladeshi culture. In the interview sessions, every interviewee said that they went there to meet Bangladeshi people and to get the taste of Bangladeshi culture. Bangladeshi culture is considered as the foundation to every diaspora in order to form a community wherever they are.

### 4.2.5 Ethnic and Gender Identity

In order to find out how the females were representing their ethnicity and gender in the cyber space, a number of questions related to this topic were asked to them. Diversified answers came out though the discussions. First generation emigrants said that they like to represent themselves as Bangladeshi there. The second generation who were born and grown up there said that this was not a big factor for them, but they preferred to represent themselves as Bangladeshi first, then they add their host identity with it, such as Bangladeshi American or Bangladeshi Canadian etc. Regarding the questions, how they represent their gender in the site, everybody said that they represented themselves as females always, but some young diaspora said that for fun; some times they represented themselves as males.

### 5. Conclusion

Researchers have to sort, balance, and analyze what they hear. By analyzing, researchers will create their narratives that can be as simple as summary phrases (Hine, 2000: 58). By analyzing all the questions and answers that were achieved by using the qualitative methodologies, we came up with some concrete ideas concerning our new relationship with the Internet and the cyberspace. This is conspicuous that the Internet is being used in numerous ways regularly in order to carry out our daily demands. Every interviewee, in my interview sessions, said that in order to accomplish their everyday needs, such as sending email, reading newspaper, paying the bills, and entertainment, the Interned was used. They visited the *addacafe* when
they had available time to meet people from the same cultural background. There are some important data achieved from the methods which are going to be compared and contrasted in the following parts to observe how far and close they are to the theories.

In the theoretical rationale part, a number of theories have been discussed. At the beginning of this section, the author Risman’s of ‘gender and society’ has been discussed. In this theory, we see that gender is identified as an institution whereby the imbalance power relation is penetrated into our society (Risman, 1994: 430-431). What kinds of situations the women are facing in their online and offline life is the first part of the first research question. We found some interesting data to see what kinds of situations there are facing in their online and offline life. Through gender discrimination, the male dominant society identifies men in the hegemonic position. This kind of patriarchal social condition evidently exists in Bangladeshi diasporic community. Nahar discusses that in the USA and in Sweden, males are given more freedom than females in the diasporic community. Females are given gender specific chores and duties in their home environment (Nahar, 2008: 5). Stephanie states how females are facing gender discrimination and sexual harassment in cyberspace. In her writing, she shows how gender discrimination and sexual harassment are implicated in females’ life in online (Brail, 1996: 141-145). In my research, I saw that married females are facing more gender discrimination than single women inside their homes. There was no data available which could convincingly imply the fact that most diasporic females were given gender specific duties at home or have faced gender discrimination in society. Rather, very different information came into view in my research, as I found that every unmarried female was enjoying the desired amount of freedom in their homes. And the questions regarding online sexual harassment, everybody asserted that they all more or less encountered this problem sometimes in addacafe but this problem was avoidable. In the ethnographic research, there was no sign of gender discrimination evidently observed; relatively the equal participation in any sort of discussion was the common scenario in the place. In gendered society, women are considered always as inferior who are deprived of getting equal opportunities to attend in any kind of open discussion with men which we frequently encounter in most of the theories related to gender. Those kinds of situations were outside of the view in the site. Both males and females were considered equal to perform
any kind of activity in the virtual place. In *addacafe*, the admin observes everything very properly. So if any unwanted situation occurs, the mastermind will be blocked for a while. This research did not find any data that suggested that gender discrimination evidently exists on *addacafe*.

In the next part, the definition of feminism stated by Byerly and Ross will be discussed. In the discussion, the feminist analysts study gender discrimination and power relation which has been penetrated profoundly in our society (Byerly, Ross, 2006: 3). In the post-colonial feminism, McEwan discusses that the contemporary idea of feminism which fails to see the value of other cultures. The equal right is the main demand of the modern feminism. But they do not know that females worldwide face discrimination based on nationality, race, class, religion, and many other things that the Western World can not even imagine to acknowledge. The people in the third world do not think that men are the primary source of oppression. Rather there are many other sectors concerned with oppression of women (McEwan, 2001: 6). Johansson’s believes that the new tool the computer technology is proffering is an option for women to overcome the problems stated above (Johansson, 2007: 115-116). How the females are representing their gender and ethnic identity in their online life is the last part of the first question. We received some interesting data regarding the second research question. There are some other theorists who think that the computer technology is offering us freedom to transform ourselves into someone else. For example, one can represent oneself as a male or as a female in cyberspace. In my research, there was no data available to prove that diasporic Bangladeshi females are seeking the desired freedom by changing who they are on the website. To avoid loneliness and to meet people from the same ethnic group were found to be the main reasons that attract women to the website. Instead of taking cyberlife seriously, the unmarried females went on the site just for fun. In the interviews, most of the teenagers responded that in order to have fun, sometimes they represented themselves as boys, but not because they felt oppressed as females.

In the diasporic identity and culture part, this paper pays attention on how cultural mixing is happening. Several theories have been discussed in this part. Mainly, I have paid attention to Hall’s work in this part of the essay. He thinks that due to human mobility from one place to another, a new sort of cultural mixing is evident which
Hall calls “hybrid identity”. The new diaspora are bound to have at least two identities, and they have to speak at least two languages. Through this way, the hybrid culture is emerging (Hall, 1990: 43). Nahar says that diasporic Bangladeshi people are suffering to maintain two identities. Second generation people prefer to adopt host identity; whereas first generations want to keep home identity (Nahar, 2005: 5). This paper wanted to understand how these people express their ethnic and gender identity on the website. In my research, the thing that became evident to us is that the first generation of immigrants has a massive attraction towards their home culture. They prefer to express themselves as Bangladeshi. There was no data available to say that the first generation was in trouble to maintain two identities; rather I saw that the second generation people, the teenaged group, like to express themselves as Bangladeshi as well as American or Canadian or European. Simultaneously they are maintaining two identities. The second generation did not assert in the interviews that they were encountering problems to maintain two identities. The way they talked and behaved did not sound to me that they were pure Bangladeshi. In their conversation, they were not able to use the Bengali language only; rather they mix-up Bengali and English all the time. And they say everything in very short way which was hard to understand which I have noticed very carefully during conducting my field observation. On the website, I founded that a new sort of language is emerging through the activities of the second generation people, which is a mixture of Bengali and English, which can be considered the result of hybrid culture. On the contrary, the first generation gave preference to Bengali language. They like to talk and express their feelings in Bengali devoid of mixing both Bengali and English together.

Previously in the essay, the connection of the diasporic community and cyberspace was discussed. In addition, how the formation of online communities is inspired by ethnicity was also stated. Regarding the virtual community, Gajjala says that this sort of community can be defined as a social space in which people still meet face-to-face but under a new definition. The word ‘virtual’ in front the community indicates what kind of new definition has been evolved due to computer mediated communication (Gajjala, 2003: 45). Turkle says that the new technology gives us the opportunity to make virtual communities, in which people participate from different parts of the world (Turkle, 1995: 6). In this essay, I also stated that many websites on the Internet are based on ethnicity. So with this paper, I wanted to explore why the diasporic
Bangladeshi females are interested to be a part of addacafe community. To find out the answer to this question, ten interviews were conducted in this research, and all interviewees agreed that the site is popular among many diasporic Bangladeshi females. These females go on the site to meet other Bangladeshi people. And the ability to have conversations in the Bengali language is another discernable feature which attracts them. So ethnicity was their highest priority in order to be a part of addacafe online community there.

In the last part of the theories section, Sunden’s materiality in cyberspace was discussed. The author says that the ways people have been represented in cyberspace has a material value (Sunden, 2003: 53-54). We use this theory to answer the second part of the second research question. Through the theory, the ways in which cyberspace brings facility into the lives of marginalized people was discussed. In my research, the young females said that they do not consider the website to be a part of their lives even though they are on it everyday. They are attracted by the fun part of cyberlife as stated above. On the other hand, I found that cyberlife is taken seriously by females who live alone in foreign countries. To them, cyberlife was not just for fun; rather the website was comparable to the real world, a place where they can make friendships and share their problems. Sometimes people represented themselves with different names, but they do it not only to hide their real names but also to inform other people that they come from Bangladesh. It was also found in the research that their names do not imply explicitly any connection with their real lives.

5.1 The Use of Data in Future:

In future, I hope this research can be done extensively. The researchers, I hope, will cover more people’s interview which could not be possible in this research due to time limitation to get more results. In future, the data those I have received through my research can be used as the reference for the future research result. I hope that these results will help the future research to see how the society is being shaped by the technology.
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Appendix

Questions for the Qualitative Interviews

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. What do you do?
5. What about your family?
6. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
7. What do you do in your leisure time?
8. Do you have to help your parents for household works?
9. Do you think that your rest of the family members are getting more liberty than you?
10. Do you think that you are oppressed at your home?
11. Why do you use the Internet?
12. Why do you go to addacafe?
13. What kinds of things are attracting you in that site?
14. How often you go there?
15. How do you express your identity there?
16. Do you face sexual discrimination of sexual harassment in the cyberspace?
17. Do you think that you have a life in the cyberspace?