

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
Institute of Cultural Research

**Shakeel Chauhan**

Indian and Asian Restaurants in Estonia: Authenticity and Hybridity

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Elo-Hanna Seljamaa  
Dr. Margaret Lyngdoh

Tartu, 2025

<b>Table of Content</b>	
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Structure of the Thesis:</b>	<b>9</b>
Purpose and Objectives of This Study	9
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>TERMINOLOGICAL DISCUSSION AND AN OVERVIEW OF RESTAURANTS IN ESTONIA</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 Indian/Asian: Why Are the Terms Used Separately?	11
1.2 Brief overview of Spices	12
1.2.1 The Historical and Economic Significance of the Spice Trade	14
1.2.2 Present and future of the worldwide Spice market	15
1.2.3 Indian Cuisines in Europe	16
1.3 Indian and Asian Restaurants in Estonia: Popularity and Cultural Impact	17
1.3.1 The Estonian Restaurant Scene and Culinary Tourism	22
<b>CHAPTER- II</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	24
2.1.1 Cultural Adaptation, Acculturation, and Global Culinary Flows	24
2.1.2 Hybridity, Fusion, and Identity Negotiation	24
2.1.3 Transnationalism, Diaspora, and Culinary Heritage	25
2.1.4 Entrepreneurship, Culinary Innovation, and Technology	25
2.1.5 Culinary Authenticity, Localization, and Consumer Expectations	26
2.1.6 South Asian Migration and the Role of Food	26
2.1.7 Food, Heritage, and Estonian National Identity	27
	2

2.2 Research Methodology	27
2.2.1 Interviews with Restaurant Owners (Appendix-2)	29
2.2.2 Interviews with Chefs (Appendix-2)	29
2.2.3 Customer Feedbacks (Appendix-3)	29
2.3 Data Analysis Techniques	30
2.4 Ethical Considerations	30
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1 Owners Insights Objectives:	32
3.1.1 Profiles of Restaurant Owners	34
3.1.2 Owner Insights	40
3.2 Chefs Insights Objectives	41
3.2.1 Profiles of Chefs	43
3.2.2 Chef Insights (Monk Restaurants)	44
3.3 Customer Interaction	45
3.4 Comparative Insights: Culinary Perspectives from Restaurateurs and Customers	49
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Resümee</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>62</b>
Appendix 1: Major Indian spices and their origin.	62
Appendix 2: Interview details of restaurant owners	64
Appendix 3: Interview details of restaurant Chefs	66
Appendix 4: Customer Interaction	68

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Radar plot consisting the information of percentage of spices used in cuisines.	13
Figure 2: (a) Share of Indian spices in global spice export and (b) the spices which are prominently exported in 2021(Malhotra 2021).	16
Figure 3: Information about Indian and Asian Restaurants in Tallinn and Tartu	19
Figure 4: Flowchart containing the information of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonian cities (Tallinn and Tartu).	20
Figure 5: Monk Restaurant journey from 2011 to 2024	35
Figure 6: Balli Chauhan being felicitated with a certificate, pictured with staff and players on a football ground.	36
Figure 7: Article from Postimees, published on February 24, 2024, featuring Monk owner Balli Chauhan.	37
Figure 8: Hanno Pevkur, Minister of Defence, Estonia, making a special visit to MONK Wok & Sushi, Jõhvi.	38

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Elo-Hanna Seljamaa and Dr. Margaret Lyngdoh, for their exceptional support, insightful guidance, and constant encouragement throughout the process of this thesis. Their patience, availability, and constructive feedback were instrumental in shaping my research.

I am deeply thankful to my mother for her unconditional love and strength, and to my brother, Sahil Chauhan, for his consistent encouragement and support during this academic journey.

I wish to express sincere thanks to Professor Kristel Kivari, our Program Director, for her kindness, academic leadership, and continued support during my studies.

I am grateful to all my classmates in the Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies program for their friendship, intellectual exchange, and support that enriched my academic experience.

I also sincerely acknowledge the valuable time and insights shared by the individuals I interviewed, who contributed significantly to this research:

- Mr. Balli Chouhan, owner of Monk Restaurant
- Mr. Udeya Vir Singh, owner of Vegen (Home Kitchen)
- Mr. Ramhari Bhandari, owner of Asian Chef by Cayenne
- Mr. Captain Taman, owner of Mandala Restaurant
- Mr. Mahendra Gopal Khaire, Head Chef at Monk, Tallinn
- Mr. Rajesh, Head Chef at Monk, Kuressaare

Their stories, experiences, and perspectives formed the core of this research, and I am truly grateful for their openness and generosity.

To all those who supported, encouraged, or contributed to this journey.

Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Indian and Asian cuisines in Estonia, focusing on the experiences of chefs, restaurant owners, and consumers in Tallinn and Tartu. Using field observations and interviews and the concepts of authenticity and hybridity, it explores how traditional recipes are adapted to local tastes. Findings highlight shifts in Estonian food preferences, increased use of plant-based and local ingredients, and the importance of language, community ties, and digital platforms for business success. The study concludes that these adaptations reflect cultural hybridization, blending tradition with innovation to enrich Estonia's culinary landscape.

**Keywords:** Culinary Adaptation, Indian Cuisine, Cultural Hybridization, Estonian Food Culture, Restaurant Sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Estonia's culinary landscape has witnessed significant transformation, marked by the growing visibility and popularity of Indian and other Asian cuisines. This trend is not simply about the addition of new flavors to local menus—it reflects deeper societal changes driven by globalization, migration, and increasing cultural openness. As Estonia continues its post-Soviet transition toward a more cosmopolitan and globally integrated society, the embrace of diverse food cultures signals a broader acceptance of cultural pluralism and international influences (Anderson, Benbow, & Manzin, 2016; Kannike & Bardone, 2022; OECD, 2024).

Despite the increasing presence of Indian and Asian restaurants in cities such as Tallinn and Tartu, academic research on their development and cultural significance within Estonia remains limited. Most European studies on ethnic cuisines, culinary traditions of a small group distinct from the local population, focus on countries with long-standing and sizable South Asian communities, such as the United Kingdom or Germany. Historically, the emergence of ethnic restaurants has been closely linked to patterns of migration, as these establishments have served as important spaces for preserving and sharing cultural identity within host societies. For instance, the earliest known restaurant, dating back to around 1100 AD, is believed to have served ethnic meals to travelers highlighting the longstanding link between food, migration, and cultural continuity (Farrer, 2011; Reddy & van Dam, 2020; Sattarzadeh et al., 2023).

In these larger contexts, Indian cuisine has often been examined through the lenses of colonial history, diasporic identity, and multicultural policies. However, Estonia provides a different and relatively unexplored setting where Indian and Asian food traditions have only recently begun to enter the mainstream, and where the South Asian population is still small but gradually expanding (Trade with Estonia, 2025; Polese et al., 2020). This shift presents an important opportunity to explore how ethnic cuisines are received, adapted, and integrated in emerging multicultural societies with limited prior exposure to such culinary traditions.

Ethnic cuisine plays a crucial role in facilitating cultural exchange by enabling everyday encounters with other cultures. In Estonia, this is increasingly evident in the availability of Indian spices and ingredients in local grocery stores and specialty shops, empowering

Estonians to experiment with Indian recipes and incorporate Asian flavors into their daily cooking. Such culinary engagement extends beyond restaurant dining, contributing to the normalization and domestication of foreign food cultures. This process not only diversifies the local palate but also fosters intercultural understanding and appreciation (Karaosmanoğlu, 2020; Liu & Mattila, 2015).

This thesis explores the evolution and localization of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia, aiming to understand how these businesses have emerged, how traditional Indian and Asian dishes are adapted to local tastes, and how these culinary practices contribute to broader cultural interactions. The study also examines how such restaurants influence public perceptions of Asian identities and serve as platforms for cultural exchange. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork, including interviews conducted in months of 2025 with restaurant owners, chefs, and a diverse range of customers, the research provides first hand insight into how food acts as a medium of adaptation, negotiation, and cultural expression in a rapidly changing society.

While previous scholarship has emphasized ethnic restaurants as important sites of cultural identity, memory, and belonging, much of it focuses on large Western nations or adopts policy-driven perspectives. In contrast, this study centers on the lived experiences of those directly involved in the restaurant industry in Estonia, a country where food-related intercultural dynamics are still emerging and remain under-researched (Derek, 2020; Bardone & Kannike, 2018; OECD, 2025).

By foregrounding the voices of restaurateurs, chefs, and consumers, this research contributes a grounded and context-specific perspective on the integration of Indian and Asian cuisines into Estonia's cultural fabric. It highlights the tensions and opportunities involved in balancing culinary authenticity with local adaptation, and illustrates how food can function simultaneously as a bridge between cultures and a space of negotiation. In doing so, this thesis adds to broader academic discussions on globalization, migration, and identity in post-Soviet and post-industrial societies, positioning Estonia as an emerging case study in the evolving landscape of multicultural Europe.

## Structure of the Thesis:

This thesis is structured into three chapters. **Chapter 1** offers a general overview of Indian spices and traces the evolution of Indian and Asian cuisines within the Estonian context. It also examines the current state and future prospects of the spice market in Estonia. **Chapter 2** outlines the theoretical framework and details the research methodology: qualitative on-site interviews with restaurant owners, chefs, and customers. **Chapter 3** presents a comprehensive analysis of the empirical data, discussing key findings derived from the interviews. The chapter concludes with a summary of results, practical recommendations, and directions for future research. Final section contains the conclusion of the work.

### Purpose and Objectives of This Study

This study aims to investigate the evolving presence and development of Indian restaurants in Estonia during the 2020s, with a particular focus on how these establishments negotiate the dual imperatives of maintaining culinary authenticity and adapting to local consumer preferences. The research explores the operational strategies, cultural positioning, and culinary practices of Indian restaurants, while also incorporating insights from Estonian diners to better understand local perceptions of Indian cuisine.

To guide this inquiry, the study is structured around the following key research questions:

1. **1:** In what ways do Indian restaurant owners and chefs in Estonia balance the pursuit of culinary authenticity with the need for local adaptation in terms of ingredients, preparation methods, and menu offerings?
2. **2:** How is Indian cuisine perceived and experienced by Estonian customers from diverse demographic backgrounds, and what cultural or culinary factors influence these perceptions?
3. **3:** What are the principal challenges and opportunities faced by Indian restaurants operating in Estonia, especially concerning ingredient sourcing, pricing structures, market competition, and digital food delivery platforms?
4. **4:** How do spices contribute to the maintenance of authenticity and the construction of a global identity for Indian/Asian cuisine within the Estonian culinary landscape?

Correspondingly, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To map the existing landscape of Indian (and select Asian) restaurants in Estonia and assess their positioning within the broader context of the country's food culture.
- To examine the strategic approaches employed by Indian restaurateurs and chefs to accommodate local tastes while preserving traditional culinary elements.
- To analyze the perceptions and dining experiences of Estonian customers in relation to Indian cuisine.
- To identify the factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of Indian restaurants in Estonia, including operational, economic, and cultural dimensions.
- To investigate the historical and contemporary significance of spices in shaping the culinary identity of Indian food, both globally and within the Estonian context.

This targeted approach enables a nuanced and context-specific analysis of how Indian cuisine is being reinterpreted, localized, and sustained within the framework of Estonia's contemporary gastronomic environment.

## CHAPTER I

### TERMINOLOGICAL DISCUSSION AND AN OVERVIEW OF RESTAURANTS IN ESTONIA

#### 1.1 Indian/Asian: Why Are the Terms Used Separately?

Indian refers to the cuisine and culture of India, while Asian is a broader term covering the cuisines of various Asian countries.

The terms "Indian" and "Asian" carry distinct cultural and culinary connotations, both of which are central to the framing of this thesis. The label "Indian" refers specifically to the culinary traditions of the Indian subcontinent, encompassing a wide array of regional cuisines such as Punjabi, South Indian, Bengali, and Mughlai. These cuisines are defined by their unique spice blends, preparation techniques, religious influences, and symbolic cultural practices (Sankar, 2017; Au, 2024). Referring to a restaurant or dish as "Indian" allows for these diverse yet interconnected food traditions to be acknowledged and analyzed in their own right.

In contrast, "Asian" is a broader, more ambiguous term that is frequently used to describe food cultures from multiple regions, including East Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Korea), Southeast Asia (e.g., Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia), and South Asia (e.g., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh). While this category is often employed for convenience in marketing and public discourse, it can lead to problematic oversimplification. Using "Asian" as a catch-all term risks erasing the cultural and culinary distinctions between these diverse traditions, creating a homogenized image of "Asian food" that lacks specificity (Reddy & van Dam, 2020). As Narayan (1995) and other scholars argue, Western representations of non-Western cuisines often rely on broad generalizations, such as labeling entire continents' culinary systems as "Asian" or "ethnic," thereby diminishing their complexity and richness.

From a geographic and sociocultural standpoint, Asia is the world's most diverse continent, comprising culinary systems shaped by differing geographies, histories, religions, and social structures. For instance, the spice-rich and frequently vegetarian Indian cuisine contrasts sharply with the umami-driven dishes of Japan or the herb-forward, lighter preparations typical of Vietnamese cuisine. Lumping these distinct

foodways into a singular “Asian” category not only perpetuates stereotypes but also reduces the analytical value of scholarly inquiry into culinary globalization.

Moreover, this distinction between “Indian” and “Asian” has significant implications for marketing, cultural representation, and diasporic identity. Indian restaurants often emphasize authenticity, traditional recipes, and cultural heritage, which serve both as a branding strategy and as a means of asserting diasporic identity through food (Sankar, 2017). In contrast, establishments branded as “Asian” may offer pan-Asian or fusion menus designed to appeal to wider audiences but risk diluting the cultural specificity of the dishes they serve. As Lu and Fine (1995) note, notions of authenticity and ethnic food are socially constructed through negotiation between restaurateurs and their clientele, influenced by commercial pressures and cultural expectations.

Given the focus of this thesis on the evolution of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia, it is essential to clarify these terms and the selection criteria for the restaurants studied. The analysis distinguishes between restaurants that identify as specifically “Indian” and those that adopt a broader “Asian” identity.

## **1.2 Brief overview of Spices**

Spices have been important in cooking around the world for a long time. People use them to add flavor, preserve food, and for health benefits. Different parts of the world have their own special spice mixes that are part of their traditional food. Indian spices—like turmeric, cumin, cardamom, and chili—are especially known for their strong taste and smell. These spices have helped Indian food become popular in many countries.

India is widely recognized across the globe for its rich variety of spices and therapeutic herbs, which are recognized for their exceptional taste, unique aroma, and powerful medicinal properties (Krishnaswamy 2008). These natural treasures have been an integral part of Indian culture and tradition for thousands of years. Spices from India are not just used to add flavor and enhance the taste of food, but they also carry significant health benefits, making them an indispensable part of culinary and medicinal practices (Krishnaswamy 2008; Anupam, Kumar, Kumari, & Singh 2018, Joseph & Voeks 2021). Out of the 80 different types of spices grown around the world, India produces nearly 50, giving it a prominent position in the global spice market (Rathore & Shekhawat 2008).

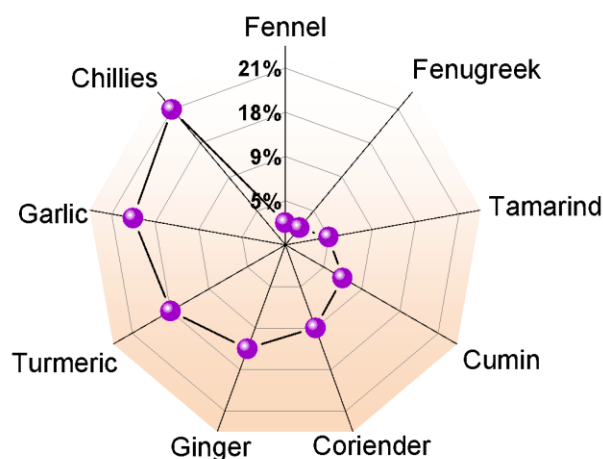


Figure 1: Radar plot consisting the information of percentage of spices used in cuisines.

Some of the most well-known spices cultivated in India include black pepper, ginger, turmeric, cardamom, cumin, and clove. The majority of spice consumption in India is primarily for culinary purposes (**Figure 1**) (Yalagala & Kumar 2018)., with key spices like chillies, pepper, turmeric, and garlic playing a central role in cooking. As a result, the increased use of these spices not only enhances the flavor and quality of food but also helps to combat hunger and malnutrition. These spices are not only common in Indian households but are also highly sought after by chefs and food enthusiasts across the world. Indian spices, with their ability to add depth and complexity to dishes, are a staple in kitchens worldwide. Pepper, often referred to as the "King of Spices," adds a sharp, pungent flavor to dishes and has been valued for its medicinal properties, including its ability to improve digestion and boost metabolism. Ginger, another essential spice, is widely used both in fresh and dried forms and is known for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, making it a common remedy for ailments like nausea, colds, and indigestion. Turmeric, with its vibrant golden color, is not only a key ingredient in many Indian dishes but also a powerful natural healer, praised for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects. Cardamom, often called the "Queen of Spices," lends a sweet aromatic.

The varied physiological and pharmacological properties of turmeric and other Indian spices have led biomedical research to concentrate on these attributes, aiming to develop functional foods and nutraceuticals while also validating the traditional uses of these spices (Verma et al.2018). Turmeric has been utilized in traditional Indian medicine for

addressing a range of health issues, such as gastrointestinal disorders, rhinitis, wound healing, deworming, and rheumatoid arthritis (Gupta & Balasubrahmanyam 1998). It is additionally utilized for cosmetic purposes. Research conducted in India has highlighted its antioxidant, cholekinetic, and anti-inflammatory properties (Gupta & Balasubrahmanyam 1998, Dubey 2017). Recent investigations, both in vitro and in vivo, involving human and animal subjects, have explored its potential to inhibit precancerous lesions, reduce inflammation, and combat atherosclerosis. The primary component of turmeric, curcumin, has demonstrated the ability to enhance DNA repair mechanisms, elevate detoxification enzyme levels, reduce mutations, and inhibit tumor formation in various animal studies (Dubey 2017). Turmeric has demonstrated potential in mitigating hyperlipidemia in obese rats and delaying the onset of diabetes-induced cataracts (Dubey 2017). Several newly identified molecular targets contribute to these preventive and therapeutic outcomes. Fenugreek seeds, rich in soluble fibre and commonly utilized in Indian cuisine, serve as a valuable dietary addition for individuals with diabetes, as they have the potential to lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels (Gong, Fang, Dong, Wang, Hu, & Lu 2016). Moreover, research indicates that garlic, onions, and ginger positively influence the carcinogenesis process, highlighting their potential role as functional foods in disease prevention (Masood Sadiq Butt, Naz, A., Muhammad Tauseef Sultan, & Mir. 2013).

### **1.2.1 The Historical and Economic Significance of the Spice Trade**

The spice trade has long been a major driver of global economic activity, cultural exchange, and historical transformation. Spanning over 4,000 years, its origins trace back to early trade networks in the Middle East. Spices such as black pepper, turmeric, cumin, and cardamom—highly valued for their culinary, medicinal, and preservative properties—were once among the world’s most prized commodities (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024). In antiquity, Arab traders dominated the trade, often using mythical narratives to obscure the origins of spices and protect trade routes. The development of the Silk Road significantly enhanced connectivity between Asia and the Mediterranean, linking civilizations like India, China, Persia, Egypt, and Rome. Infrastructure advancements, such as the canal connecting the Nile to the Red Sea, further facilitated spice movement from the Indian subcontinent to Europe. With the Roman

annexation of Egypt, Alexandria rose as a major trade hub, while cities like Venice later became key distributors across Europe (Wikipedia Contributors 2025, Turner 2015).

Indian spices were especially esteemed in Europe, and their high demand played a crucial role in triggering the Age of Discovery. Vasco da Gama's voyage to India in 1498 marked a major shift by establishing direct maritime trade between Europe and India, bypassing traditional land routes controlled by Arab merchants (Hadacek 2002, Rathore & Shekhawat 2008, Ravindran, 2023).

During the colonial period, institutions such as the British East India Company enabled European powers to consolidate control over spice-producing regions in India. This led to the integration of Indian spices into European economies and cuisines. By the early 20th century, these spices had become embedded in European daily life, often distributed through local merchants and retailers (Henriques 2019, The Silk Road Spice Merchant 2017).

The entry of other global players, such as the United States in the 18th century, introduced innovations like spice blends and dehydrated seasonings. Over time, the spread of spice cultivation and trade knowledge weakened earlier monopolies, making spices more accessible. This shift transformed them from rare luxury items into everyday staples in kitchens and pharmacies worldwide (Sharangi & Acharya 2018).

### **1.2.2 Present and future of the worldwide Spice market**

The global seasoning and spices market was valued at USD 21.69 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 6.8% from 2024 to 2030, driven by demand for diverse flavors and health-conscious products. Europe is a leading importer, accounting for 26% of global spice imports in 2020, while Asia leads with 47%. European imports of spices, largely from developing countries, are expected to grow by 0-2% in the coming years (Grand View Research 2018). According to recent statistical data presented in a report by Suresh K. Malhotra et al., India continues to assert its dominance in the global spice market, holding a significant 43% share of the worldwide trade (Figure 2a). This makes India one of the leading players in the international spice economy, with the remaining 57% of the market accounted for by the rest of the world (Figure 2a). This data emphasizes India's pivotal role in the spice industry, both in terms of production and exports. The country's deep-rooted connection to spices, which spans

millennia, continues to thrive in the modern global economy (Malhotra 2021). India holds a significant 43% share of the global spice market, with spice oils contributing over 70% of its total spice exports (Figure 2b). These oils, extracted from spices like mint, cinnamon, and cardamom, are used in industries such as perfumery, pharmaceuticals, food processing, and cosmetics. Other key exports include cumin, turmeric, curry powders, mint products, chilli, and ginger, all valued for their flavor and health benefits (Figure 2b). India's dominance in the spice trade is bolstered by its ability to meet global demand for natural and organic products.

Indian spices have not only played a pivotal role in shaping the global spice trade but have also significantly influenced the restaurant industry worldwide.

Indian spices have seamlessly integrated into diverse cuisines, enriching the dining experience and leaving a lasting imprint on the international restaurant market.

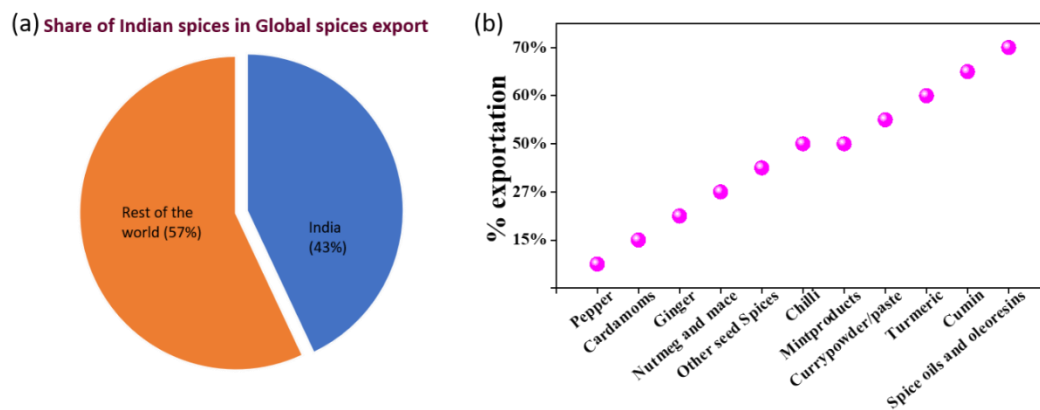


Figure 2: (a) Share of Indian spices in global spice export and (b) the spices which are prominently exported in 2021(Malhotra 2021).

### 1.2.3 Indian Cuisines in Europe

The migration of Indian cuisine to Europe occurred alongside the spice trade, particularly during the British colonial period in India (mid-18th to mid-20th century). British officers and officials stationed in India during this time developed a taste for Indian dishes, which they brought back to Europe, especially from the late 18th century onwards as the British Raj expanded its influence (Cox 2013, Antani & Mahapatra 2022). Indian curries, spiced meats, and chutneys became popular in England, leading to the creation of Anglo-Indian

cuisine. Over time, Indian restaurants began to emerge across Europe, introducing a wider audience to the rich and diverse flavors of Indian cooking (Fielding 2014).

Today, Indian spices and cuisines have become an integral part of European culinary culture, with dishes like curry, biryani, and tandoori widely enjoyed across the continent. The migration of Indian spices and cuisine not only enriched European palates but also contributed to a global appreciation of India's culinary heritage.

### **1.3 Indian and Asian Restaurants in Estonia: Popularity and Cultural Impact**

Indian and Asian restaurants have become increasingly prominent in Estonia, particularly in urban hubs such as Tallinn, Tartu, and Pärnu (Maheshwari 2015). These establishments offer a wide array of dishes—from Indian curries and biryanis to Asian staples like sushi and pad Thai—demonstrating both authentic culinary traditions and localized adaptations (Gabriel 2022, Asian | Restaurants | Tallinn 2025). Many have modified spice levels and incorporated locally sourced ingredients to cater to Estonian tastes, while others maintain traditional recipes to appeal to diners seeking a more authentic experience (Estonia: A Hidden Delight for a Gastronomic Adventure, 2023). To explore this evolving culinary landscape, the following Figure 4 has been compiled to document and analyze the presence, diversity, and operational models of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia's two major cities like Tallinn and Tartu. As the capital and most internationally connected city, Tallinn hosts a wide range of globally influenced dining options. In contrast, Tartu, known for its vibrant university community, fosters a more experimental and youthful food culture. Data for the table was collected through online platforms such as Google Maps, TripAdvisor, and official restaurant websites, and was further supplemented by in-person visits and informal interviews with restaurant owners and staff.

A clear distinction was made between chain and independent restaurants to better understand differences in branding, authenticity, and customer experience. While chain restaurants often feature standardized menus and marketing strategies, independent establishments typically run by local or immigrant entrepreneurs tend to offer more personalized service and traditional recipes. This distinction is vital in assessing how cultural authenticity is maintained or adapted in different business models.

Cuisine types such as Indian, Chinese, Thai, or Asian fusion were categorized primarily based on how restaurants present themselves publicly. In cases where this was not clearly

defined, the categorization was informed by menu offerings and overall branding. This approach ensures that both the restaurant's intended identity and actual culinary focus are accurately represented. Overall, the compiled data provides insights into the patterns of cultural adaptation, consumer demand, and the evolving culinary identity of Asian cuisine in Estonia. The restaurants listed in the table serve as representative examples of these trends and highlight the growing appreciation for diverse food cultures within the country.

Category	City	Restaurant Name	Address	Cuisine	Independent/ Chain
Indian	Tallinn	Maharaja	Raekoja plats 13, Tallinn	Indian	Independent
Indian	Tallinn	Chakra	Bremeni käik 1, Tallinn	Indian	Independent
Indian	Tallinn	Ginger	Toompuiestee 29, Tallinn	Indian	Independent
Indian	Tallinn	Elevant	Vene 5, Tallinn	Indian	Independent
Indian	Tallinn	Guru	Aia 10a, Tallinn	Indian	Independent
Asian	Tallinn	CHI	Estonia Pst 9, Tallinn	Asian	Chain

Figure 3: Information about Indian and Asian Restaurants in Tallinn and Tartu

Asian	Tallinn	Lendav Taldrik	Telliskivi 60A, Tallinn	Asian	Independent
Asian	Tallinn	Restoran Friend's	E. Vilde 128, Tallinn	Asian	Chain
Asian	Tallinn	Villa Thai	Vilmsi 6, Tallinn	Asian	Independent
Asian	Tallinn	Monk Restaurant	Peterburi tee 2 Tallinn	Asian	Chain
Asian	Tartu	Monk Restaurant	Turu 2, Tartu	Asian	Chain
Asian	Tartu	Asian Chef	Võru 2, Tartu	Asian	Independent
Asian	Tartu	Vaga Mama	Ülikooli 2, Tartu	Asian	Independent
Asian	Tartu	Mandala	Rüütli 3, Tartu, Estonia	Asian	Independent
Indian	Tartu	VEGEN (Home Kitchen)	Peetri 27a Tartu	Indian	Independent

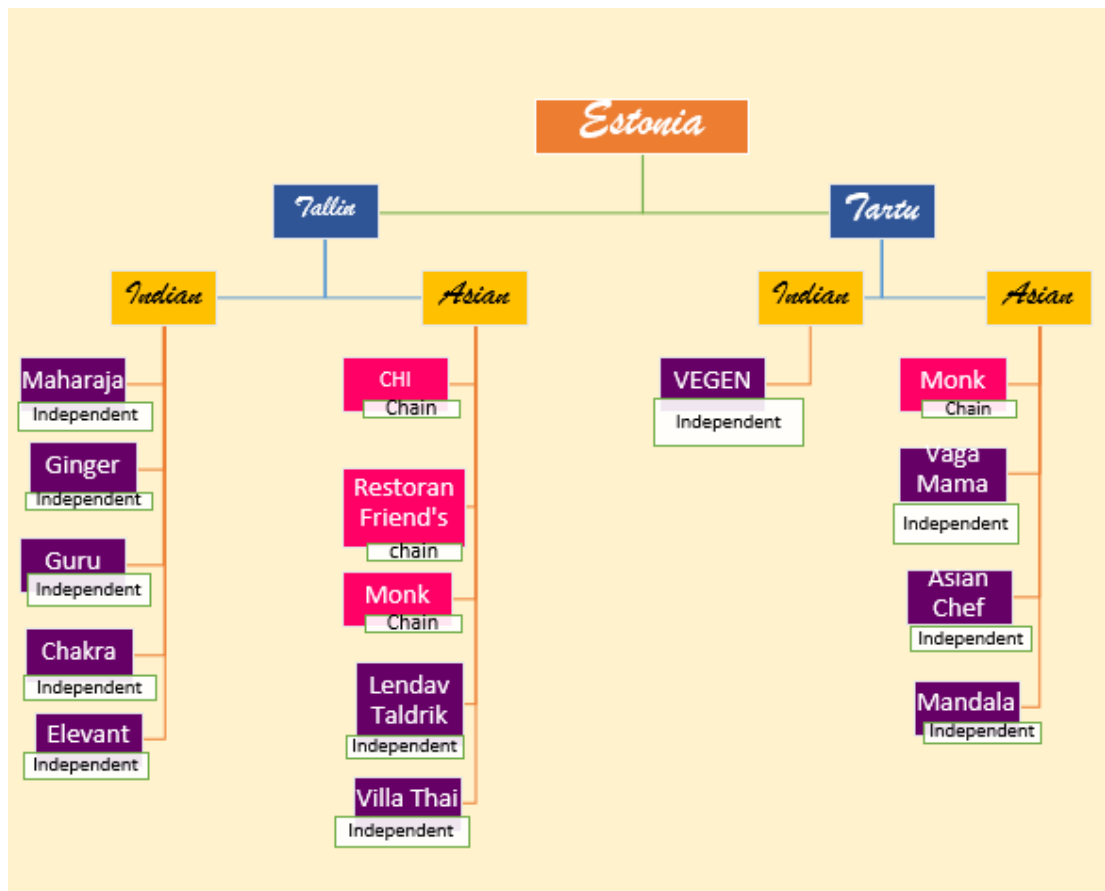


Figure 4: Flowchart containing the information of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonian cities (Tallinn and Tartu).

The distribution of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia, particularly in Tallinn and Tartu, reveals distinct patterns in terms of ownership and culinary orientation. In Tallinn, Indian restaurants such as Maharaja, Ginger, Guru, Chakra, and Elevant are all independent, reflecting a focus on maintaining **culinary specificity and individual identity**. Conversely, most Asian restaurants in Tallinn such as CHI and Monk are chains, indicating a more commercial and standardized approach. In Tartu, the trend is more mixed. While Monk operates as a chain, the majority of other establishments, including Vaga Mama, Mandala, and Asian Chef, are independent and often blend multiple Asian cuisines. **VEGEN**, however, stands out as an independent restaurant offering **exclusively Indian cuisine, maintaining a clear cultural focus**. Overall, restaurants in Tartu appear more inclined toward hybridity and diverse menu offerings, aiming to attract a broader and more varied clientele.

**MAHARAJA** in Tallinn is one of the oldest and the first Asian restaurants, opening in 1989. This restaurant helped bring Indian flavors to the country. In Tartu, Asian Chef is one of the city's oldest restaurants offering authentic Asian dishes. Known for its traditional recipes and fresh ingredients, it's a popular choice for those who love genuine Asian flavors. Similar restaurants can also be found in Narva, making Asian food available in many Estonian cities, and restaurants like Asian Chef have helped introduce locals to Asian food. In 2011, Monk Restaurant was established, adding to the variety of Asian food available in the country. Additionally, CHI and Chopsticks stand out as two of the biggest Asian food chains in Estonia. Known for their wide variety of dishes and convenient locations (e.g. Endla 45, Lootsi 12a, Kalda tee 1, Järve Keskus, Mustamäe Keskus, etc.), these chains have played a key role in making Asian cuisine easily accessible and popular among Estonians. Their consistent quality and extensive menus have made them favorites for those seeking quick and flavorful Asian meals.

In Tartu, a vegan home kitchen stands out for its focus on authentic Indian cuisine, offering a wide selection of traditional dishes that cater to the growing demand for Indian flavors. As a restaurant dedicated solely to Indian food, it has become a go-to spot for those looking to experience the vibrant and diverse tastes of India. The menu features everything from aromatic biryanis and rich curries to vegetarian delicacies and popular street food, all crafted with traditional recipes and spices.

The availability of Indian and Asian cuisine has expanded with quality dining options now found across six major cities in Estonia. In Tallinn, the capital city, there is a wide variety of Asian and Indian restaurants offering a range of flavorful dishes to suit different tastes. Pärnu, a well-known seaside city, also has several Asian dining options, contributing to its diverse culinary scene. Cities like Narva, Kuressaare, and Jõhvi have also embraced the flavors of Asia, with local restaurants offering both traditional and modern interpretations of Asian cuisine. Indian cuisine specifically refers to the food and culture of India, a South Asian country known for its flavorful spices, herbs, and variety of cooking styles. Popular dishes like curries, biryani, naan, and samosas highlight the country's regional diversity, including Punjabi, South Indian, and Bengali specialities. On the other hand, Asian cuisine covers the entire continent of Asia, including East Asia (e.g., sushi, dumplings, ramen), Southeast Asia (e.g., pad Thai, pho, satay), South Asia (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepali dishes), and Central Asia. Indian restaurants focus on the

unique tastes and traditions of India, while Asian restaurants often offer a mix of dishes from different countries in Asia (Wikipedia Contributors. 2019).

### **1.3.1 The Estonian Restaurant Scene and Culinary Tourism**

Estonia's restaurant sector has become increasingly dynamic, influenced by the growth of culinary tourism, urban development, and digital platforms. Cities such as Tallinn and Tartu have positioned themselves as emerging gastronomic hubs, offering diverse cuisines, including Indian and Asian. Digital platforms such as TripAdvisor, Bolt Food, and Wolt play a significant role in enhancing the visibility and accessibility of these restaurants, expanding their reach to both local and international audiences.

However, this visibility also brings representational challenges. Online reviews and algorithm-driven categorizations often frame ethnic restaurants through narrow tropes emphasizing exoticism or affordability thereby limiting nuanced understandings of these cuisines. As a result, Indian and Asian restaurateurs must engage in strategic positioning through branding, menu design, and digital engagement not only to ensure commercial success but also to influence how their culinary identities are perceived within Estonia's broader cultural landscape.

## CHAPTER- II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework and existing scholarly literature that inform the study of culinary adaptation and fusion in Estonia. In a world characterized by rapid globalization and increasing interconnectedness, national culinary landscapes are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries. Food, as a symbol of cultural identity, migration, and adaptation, serves as a powerful lens through which broader socio-cultural transformations can be examined. Culinary practices, once deeply rooted in local traditions, are now subject to complex processes of hybridization, globalization, and transnational exchange, all of which are integral to understanding contemporary food practices.

This chapter provides the conceptual and methodological foundation for the study. It begins by outlining the key theoretical approaches that inform the analysis of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia, including cultural adaptation, hybridity, transnationalism, culinary globalization, and diaspora entrepreneurship. These frameworks are used to examine how traditional cuisines are transformed in new cultural settings, particularly in the context of a small yet increasingly globalized country like Estonia. Central to this discussion are academic debates on culinary authenticity, fusion cuisine, and the socio-cultural role of ethnic food businesses in multicultural societies.

The second part of the chapter presents the research methodology employed in the study. It explains the qualitative approach used, including data collection through ethnographic observations, informal interviews with restaurant owners and staff, and insights gathered from customers. The methodological section also addresses issues of sampling, data sources, and the rationale for focusing on Tallinn and Tartu as representative urban centers.

Together, the theoretical and methodological components of this chapter offer an integrated framework for understanding the evolution of Indian and Asian cuisines in Estonia and set the stage for the empirical analysis presented in the following chapters.

## **2.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1.1 Cultural Adaptation, Acculturation, and Global Culinary Flows**

The concept of cultural adaptation is central to understanding how migrant restaurateurs navigate new cultural environments. Acculturation theory, introduced by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in 1936 (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits 1936), examines the cultural transformations that occur through sustained interaction between distinct cultural groups. It involves the exchange and modification of cultural traits, such as cuisine, in response to interaction between migrants and the host society.

Berry's acculturation framework (Cox 2013) refines this idea by identifying four strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. These strategies reflect varying degrees of engagement with the host culture. In the context of Indian and Asian restaurateurs in Estonia, integration and assimilation are the most visible strategies. Restaurateurs adapt traditional dishes to suit Estonian tastes, typically favoring milder and less spicy food, often modifying spice levels or substituting ingredients with locally available ones.

This adaptation is part of a broader global process of culinary exchange. As Appadurai (1996) conceptualizes through the idea of "gastro-politics," food becomes a medium for expressing identity, negotiating power, and participating in global flows. Estonia's participation in global culinary trends is evident in the growing popularity of Indian and Asian cuisines, presence of international spices in local supermarkets, and food festivals such as Tallinn Street Food Festival and Tallinn Restaurant Week. However, globalization also brings challenges like commodification and concerns over culinary authenticity (Yatharth Chauhan, Ishan Negi & Mandeep Singh. 2025).

### **2.1.2 Hybridity, Fusion, and Identity Negotiation**

Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994) is useful for understanding the innovative fusion of culinary practices that arise from intercultural contact. In Estonia, hybrid dishes like beetroot samosas, rye bread pakoras, or curried herring illustrate how Indian chefs blend local ingredients with traditional methods, reflecting a dynamic process of identity formation and adaptation.

These hybrid creations challenge static ideas of culinary authenticity. Even dishes considered emblematic of Indian cuisine, such as biryani, have multiple regional versions, and in Estonia, biryani might resemble lightly spiced stir-fried rice. Such reinterpretations provoke debates around cultural representation but also demonstrate how food evolves through cross-cultural interaction.

Fusion cuisine, as described by Johnston and Baumann (2014), represents a cosmopolitan culinary practice grounded in both producer creativity and consumer openness. For example, fusion dishes like tandoori salmon or sushi with Estonian mushrooms blur culinary boundaries and highlight how identity is negotiated through food. These innovations appeal to diverse consumers and help reframe traditional Indian or Asian food within a modern Estonian setting (Escoffier. 2022).

### **2.1.3 Transnationalism, Diaspora, and Culinary Heritage**

Transnationalism, defined by Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton 1992), refers to how migrants maintain social and cultural ties across borders. In the culinary realm, transnational networks support the exchange of food knowledge and ingredients, enabling migrant restaurateurs to recreate familiar foodscapes.

Diaspora studies highlight the symbolic and emotional importance of food in maintaining identity. Scholars like Narayan (1995) and Ray (2004) show how food serves as a vehicle for cultural memory and resistance to assimilation. In Estonia, where the Indian and South Asian communities are relatively small, restaurants and domestic food practices become essential cultural spaces where identity is expressed and preserved.

Indian restaurants in Estonia serve dual roles: catering to diaspora members and appealing to Estonian consumers. This dual function reflects both continuity and adaptation, offering insight into how food mediates experiences of migration, belonging, and negotiation in a foreign environment.

### **2.1.4 Entrepreneurship, Culinary Innovation, and Technology**

Ethnic entrepreneurship, as explained by Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990), operates within “ethnic enclave economies,” where cultural familiarity and community support

provide both opportunities and limitations (Cobas, Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward 1991). Light (2007) further argues that migrant entrepreneurs leverage cultural heritage as symbolic capital to succeed in niche markets.

In Estonia, Indian and Asian culinary entrepreneurs face challenges such as limited access to specific ingredients, a relatively small diaspora population, and the need to appeal to local tastes (Warde 2017, Lu & Fine 1995). These conditions promote innovative strategies—such as modifying recipes, offering milder spice levels, developing themed menus, or leveraging digital platforms for outreach.

Media and technology further mediate how ethnic cuisines are represented and consumed. Heldke (2024) critiques the tendency of Western media to exoticize non-Western cuisines, often stripping them of cultural depth. In Estonia, however, food blogs, social media, and review platforms help ethnic cuisines gain visibility. These platforms also pressure restaurateurs to conform to consumer expectations of novelty, presentation, and perceived authenticity.

### **2.1.5 Culinary Authenticity, Localization, and Consumer Expectations**

Authenticity, as Lu and Fine (1995) argue, is not inherent but socially constructed. In Estonia, Indian cuisine is expected to deliver particular sensory cues, aroma, richness, spice, yet many customers prefer milder, lighter meals. Restaurateurs manage these conflicting demands by offering dual menus, customizable spice levels, or localized versions of classic dishes. This balancing act between authenticity and localization is central to navigating consumer satisfaction and cultural integrity.

### **2.1.6 South Asian Migration and the Role of Food**

Food is a vital tool in the migrant experience, serving both symbolic and practical functions. Studies by Srinivas (Counihan, C., & Penny Van Esterik. 2012) and Narayan (1995) show that food helps migrants maintain cultural roots while also adapting to new environments. In Estonia, the smaller South Asian population means greater culinary adaptation, reduced spice, vegetarianism, and local sourcing yet food continues to be a key marker of identity and continuity.

### 2.1.7 Food, Heritage, and Estonian National Identity

Since the Soviet era, Estonia has undergone a cultural transformation, and food has become central to national identity construction. Rausing (2010) and Kõresaar (2004) note how post-independence Estonia has embraced international cuisines to align itself with European cosmopolitan ideals. The increasing acceptance of Indian and Asian food reflects this desire to be seen as modern and globally integrated, while also enriching the local culinary landscape through diversity and exchange.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

This research delineates the methodological framework adopted to investigate the evolution and adaptation of Indian and Asian restaurants within the Estonian culinary landscape. Given the exploratory and interpretative nature of the research, a **qualitative research design** was employed to facilitate an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of restaurant stakeholders and the socio-cultural factors influencing the localization and sustainability of Indian and Asian cuisines in Estonia.

**Semi-structured interviews** were utilized as the primary method of data collection. This method offered both structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore pre-identified themes while remaining open to new insights as they emerged. (Kakilla, Charles, 2021). The open-ended format of the interviews encouraged participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences, challenges, and strategies, thereby enriching the data with contextually grounded narratives.

**Fieldwork was conducted** between **January and April 2025** across three purposefully selected Asian restaurants and one Indian Home Kitchen : Monk Restaurant (Kuressaare and Tartu), Asian Chef by Cayenne (Tartu), Mandala Restaurant (Tartu), and VEGEN Indian Home Kitchen. These establishments were chosen based on their prominence, customer diversity, and their respective contributions to Estonia's multicultural dining landscape. The selection strategy ensured a representative sample from both capital and regional cities to capture variations in culinary practices and consumer behavior.

In total, **9 semi-structured interviews** were conducted, alongside informal interactions with **10–12 randomly selected Estonian customers**, who were asked about their motivations for visiting Asian restaurants. The formal interviews involved **4 restaurant**

**owners, 2 chefs (head chef of Monk Restaurant Tartu and Kuressaare), and 3 regular customers (An Indian Student, An Asian IT professional and One Indian Family, with each session lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes.**

- **Restaurant owners**, who offered insights into business strategies, market positioning, adaptation techniques, and challenges related to sustainability and competition;
- **Chefs**, who discussed food preparation practices, the selection and substitution of ingredients (particularly spices), and the tension between culinary authenticity and local adaptation;
- **Customers**, comprising Estonian nationals (10-12) and 3 international residents (An Indian Student, An Asian IT professional and One Indian Family) who shared perceptions on taste, authenticity, dining preferences, and their evolving interest in Indian and Asian cuisine.

Although interview questions were tailored to the role of each respondent, core themes such as authenticity, culinary adaptation, customer engagement, and satisfaction were consistently explored across all groups. This approach enabled a comparative thematic analysis and strengthened the reliability of the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that supports systematic identification, coding, and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Emergent themes included the strategic adjustment of spice levels to suit local palates, incorporation of regionally available ingredients, introduction of vegan and vegetarian options, and the continuous evolution of menus to align with consumer trends and global food movements.

In conclusion, the qualitative methodology adopted for this study provided a rigorous and context-sensitive framework for analyzing the integration of Indian and Asian culinary practices in Estonia. By capturing diverse stakeholder perspectives and examining processes of cultural negotiation, the research contributes to a broader understanding of gastronomic globalization, hybridization, and cultural exchange in the contemporary food landscape.

### **2.2.1 Interviews with Restaurant Owners (Appendix-2)**

Interviews were conducted with four renowned restaurant owners to get knowledge about the commercial viewpoint and operational dynamics of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia. Chefs were chosen for their active involvement in food preparation at Indian restaurants in Tallinn and Tartu. They were approached through in-person visits to the restaurants, where interview requests were made directly. In most instances, prior permission was obtained from the restaurant owners or managers before engaging with the chefs.

The interviewed owners of the restaurant were:

1. Balli Chouhan, the owner and proprietor of Monk Restaurant hails from India
2. Udeya Vir Singh, owner of Vegem (Home Kitchen), is an Indian entrepreneur based in Tartu.
3. Ramhari Bhandari, owner of Asian Chef by Cayenne hails from Nepal.
4. Captain Taman, owner of Mandala Restaurant hails from Nepal.

### **2.2.2 Interviews with Chefs (Appendix-2)**

To gain a deeper understanding of culinary practices, menu adaptations, and operational challenges, interviews were conducted with chefs specializing in Indian and Asian cuisine at two of the restaurants explored in this study. These participants were purposefully selected based on their professional experience and active roles in running ethnic restaurants. The aim was to gather first-hand insights directly from those involved in daily culinary operations. The interviews offered valuable perspectives on cooking techniques, ingredient sourcing difficulties, and the innovative strategies chefs use to adapt traditional dishes to local tastes, thereby shaping the Indian and Asian dining experience in Estonia.

The chefs interviewed were:

1. Mahendra Gopal Khair – Head Chef at Monk Restaurant
2. Rajesh – Head Chef at Monk, Kuressaare

### **2.2.3 Customer Feedbacks (Appendix-3)**

Customers were included in the study to understand how Indian and Asian cuisine is perceived and received by those who consume it. Their preferences, expectations, and experiences offer valuable insight into how restaurants adapt their offerings to meet local

tastes and how cultural meanings around food are negotiated. Including a diverse group such as an Asian student, a family, and an IT professional helped capture a range of perspectives based on background, familiarity with the cuisine, and dining habits.

- Reasons for choosing Indian and Asian cuisine.
- Favorite dishes and overall dining experiences.
- Expectations regarding authenticity, quality, and service.
- Openness to fusion dishes and localized adaptations.

Customer feedback helped in assessing the level of acceptance and popularity of Indian and Asian cuisine in Estonia.

### 2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected through interviews. This process involved:

1. **Transcribing interviews** – All responses were transcribed to capture details accurately.
2. **Identifying key themes** – Common patterns and recurring topics were categorized into themes such as:
  - Evolution and growth of Indian and Asian restaurants.
  - Adaptation strategies and ingredient sourcing challenges.
  - Customer preferences and cultural acceptance.
  - Business sustainability and competition.
3. **Interpreting findings** – Thematic analysis helped in drawing meaningful conclusions regarding the restaurant industry's development and consumer behavior in Estonia.

### 2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, participants were thoroughly informed about the research objectives, procedures, and the intended use of

the information provided. Informed oral consent was obtained from all participants, who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. While the names of restaurants and participants were disclosed in the research with their explicit permission, every effort was made to ensure that their perspectives were accurately and respectfully represented. Participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

As a research student who has recently migrated from India and is currently employed in the ethnic restaurant sector in Estonia, specifically at Monk Restaurant. My background helped me gain access to key people and useful insights. Being part of Monk allowed me to connect directly with the owner and head chefs in both Kuressaare and Tartu, and I was able to gather detailed input from them as well as from regular customers. This experience provided valuable material for my research. However, it also created some challenges. Among the three restaurant owners outside of Monk who participated, one agreed after a direct referral from my supervisor, Dr. Margaret Lyngdoh; another agreed through the referral of one of my classmates; and the third owner agreed after my personal visit and request. Despite several attempts, many restaurant owners either declined to meet or stopped responding, even after confirming appointments or providing a time slot. My background as a restaurant worker may have influenced their decision. While I was able to build trust within Monk, gaining access to other establishments was more difficult. I remained aware of these limitations and tried to maintain a balanced and respectful approach throughout the research.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with restaurant owners, head chefs and customers from selected Indian and Asian dining establishments in Estonia. The data, organized thematically, reflect recurring patterns in culinary adaptation and operational practices.

One consistent theme across the interviews was the modification of traditional recipes to accommodate local preferences. Respondents reported adjusting spice levels, modifying portion sizes, and sourcing ingredients locally where necessary. The preparation of milder variations of traditionally spiced dishes emerged as a common strategy to appeal to a broader Estonian clientele. Additionally, the introduction of vegetarian and vegan options was noted by several participants as a response to evolving dietary preferences.

Participants also highlighted difficulties in procuring fresh and authentic ingredients. To address these limitations, restaurants have employed substitution strategies and adapted cooking techniques to maintain consistency and quality.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of effective communication and customer interaction. Proficiency in the local language, attentiveness to feedback, and active community involvement were cited as contributing factors in developing customer relationships and ensuring repeat patronage.

Overall, the findings underscore the practical measures taken by restaurant owners and chefs to align their culinary offerings with the expectations and preferences of the Estonian market.

#### **3.1 Owners Insights Objectives:**

The interviews focused on the following key areas:

- **History and Growth of Their Restaurant**

Each owner shared insights into their restaurant's journey, from initial concept to establishment and eventual growth. They spoke about the inspiration behind

launching their businesses, the early challenges encountered during setup, and how their ventures have evolved over time. The interviews revealed that the demand for Indian and Asian cuisine in Estonia has steadily grown, partly due to the increasing number of expatriates from India and other Asian countries. This demographic shift has created new opportunities for entrepreneurs to introduce authentic flavors and establish a stronger presence in the local culinary market.

- **Obstacles Encountered in the Initiation and Maintenance of Their Enterprises**

The restaurant owners highlighted several challenges they faced, including **regulatory hurdles, sourcing authentic ingredients, workforce management, and cultural adaptation**. While sourcing traditional spices was initially a challenge, today most essential ingredients are readily available in Asian grocery stores across Estonia. Some restaurants continue to import specific spices from Finland, and a few, such as Home Kitchen, still source select ingredients directly from India. Additionally, hiring skilled chefs familiar with authentic cooking techniques was another major concern, requiring them to recruit talent from India, Nepal, and other Asian countries.

- **Market Competition and Consumer Preferences**

The Estonian food industry has seen a rise in the popularity of international cuisine, leading to increased competition among Indian and Asian restaurants. The owners noted that customer preferences vary significantly, with some seeking an authentic dining experience, while others prefer milder, adapted versions of traditional dishes. Strategies such as menu diversification, special promotions, and unique dining experiences have been implemented to attract and retain a loyal customer base.

- **Fusion Strategies and Local Taste Adaptation**

A key challenge for Indian and Asian restaurant owners in Estonia is balancing flavours with local preferences. The proprietors shared their experiences in modifying recipes to cater to Estonian taste buds while ensuring that traditional flavors remain intact. For example, some restaurants offer mild versions of classic dishes alongside spicier, authentic options for those familiar with Indian and Asian cuisine. Others have introduced fusion dishes, blending elements of Indian, Chinese and Estonian flavors to create unique offerings.

These observations provided significant perspectives on the development of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia, illustrating the economic, cultural, and social factors influencing their performance. The insights gained from these interviews contribute to a broader understanding of how ethnic cuisine businesses navigate the challenges of market integration, customer satisfaction, and long-term sustainability in a foreign environment.

### 3.1.1 Profiles of Restaurant Owners

**Balli Chouhan, the owner and proprietor of Monk Restaurant**, originally hails from, India, and is now a naturalized Estonian citizen. He moved to Estonia in 2003 on a student visa to pursue his studies at the Estonian Business School. During his early years in the country, he faced several challenges, including language barriers and cultural adjustments. To support himself, he worked in various roles, including as a kitchen helper at the Meriton Hotel, where he gained valuable experience in the hospitality industry. His perseverance and entrepreneurial spirit eventually led him to establish Monk Restaurant in 2011, with its first location in Kuressaare, Saaremaa. Balli is married to an Estonian woman, and together they have a son, symbolising the personal and cultural integration that also characterizes his professional journey. Monk Restaurant is an Asian fusion eatery offering Indian, Chinese, and Japanese cuisine, carefully adapted to suit Estonian tastes with milder spice levels. Among the most popular dishes is Chicken Tikka Masala, loved for its balanced flavors. Fluent in Estonian, Balli has built strong connections with local customers, which has contributed to the restaurant's success. Balli is married to an Estonian woman, and together they have a son, symbolizing not only personal integration but also cultural blending within Estonian society. This aligns with Berry's (1997) concept of **integration**, wherein individuals maintain their original cultural identity while actively participating in the host culture.

Monk Restaurant is an Asian fusion eatery offering Indian, Chinese, and Japanese cuisine, carefully adapted to suit Estonian tastes with milder spice levels. This strategic adaptation of flavors and menu offerings reflects elements of **assimilation** (a process in which migrants adjust their practices to align with dominant cultural preferences).

“Estonians appreciate the diversity and distinctive flavors of Asian cuisine, and we have modified the spice levels and ingredients to align with local preferences,” says Balli. “For example, we’ve adjusted our food to be less intense, making it more appealing to Estonian palates.” (Balli Chouhan, personal interview, 17 December 2024). With a growing

presence in multiple cities and strong marketing strategies, Balli now plans to expand Monk Restaurant to Pärnu very soon. His journey is a testament to perseverance, adaptability, and entrepreneurial success in Estonia's evolving culinary scene.

In addition to business growth, community engagement has been a core value of Monk Restaurant. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the restaurant provided free meals to frontline healthcare workers, a gesture that was deeply appreciated across the community. Furthermore, Monk has actively supported local sports by sponsoring ice-skating and football teams in the Ida-Virumaa region, specifically in Narva and Jõhvi. These initiatives highlight the restaurant's commitment to giving back to society beyond the culinary sphere.

The dedication of the team extends to the kitchen, where the experiences of the two head chefs from the Tallinn and Tartu branches underscore the restaurant's emphasis on collaboration, creativity, and cultural exchange. Both chefs shared how working at Monk has not only allowed them to refine their culinary skills but also to contribute meaningfully to a fusion menu that bridges Indian authenticity with Estonian tastes.



Figure 5: Monk Restaurant journey from 2011 to 2024



Figure 6: Balli Chauhan being felicitated with a certificate, pictured with staff and players on a football ground.

In recognition of these combined efforts culinary excellence, social contribution, and cultural integration Balli and his team were recently honored with the certificate, which is an official recognition given to Restaurant Monk by the Kohtla-Järve City Government for its contribution to cultural and sports activities, in celebration of Estonia’s 106th Independence Anniversary. This accolade stands as a symbol of Monk Restaurant’s meaningful presence in Estonia’s cultural and social fabric.





Figure 8: Hanno Pevkur, Minister of Defence, Estonia, making a special visit to MONK Wok & Sushi, Jõhvi.

As per Balli Chouhan, The Estonian Minister of Defence, Mr. Hanno Pevkur, visited MONK Wok & Sushi in Jõhvi in April 2025 and He has presented Balli Chouhan, owner of MONK, with a symbolic “Kaitsetahe” (Will to Defend) shirt in appreciation of his community support and involvement in national initiatives. This moment highlights MONK’s growing role not just in the culinary scene but also as a contributor to local social and civic engagement. The interaction between a state institution and an immigrant entrepreneur reflects a **symbolic fusion of cultures**, which is central to the idea of **cultural hybridity**.

Udeya, proprietor of Vegen (Home Kitchen), an Indian entrepreneur in Tartu, has lived in Estonia for 12 years and has been running his home kitchen for the past five. Before COVID, he spent six years cooking at summer markets across Estonia, gradually building his brand.

Specializing in Indian cuisine, he carefully adapts spice levels to suit Estonian tastes while preserving authenticity. In his view, Estonians appreciate Indian flavors, but they generally prefer milder dishes. To strike a balance, he enhances flavors without overwhelming the palate, ensuring a satisfying yet approachable experience. He sources high-quality spices directly from India to maintain the authenticity of his dishes.

Reflecting on Estonia's evolving food scene, he highlights Maharaja (established in the 1989s) as the country's first Indian restaurant and Asian Chef (before 2007) as another key player. With a background in the arts, he views food as a global experience and believes cultural events like Diwali play a vital role in bringing communities together.

**According to Ramhari Bhandari, the proprietor of Asian Chef by Cayenne**, Mr. Bhandari, originally from Nepal, trained in India and worked at top hotels like Ashoka and Taj. He was part of Chef Sanjeev Kapoor's core team before moving to Estonia in 2015<sup>1</sup>. After working at Hilton Tallinn, he settled in Tartu and became the full owner of Asian Chef by Cayenne in 2024. He balances authenticity with local preferences, noting that 90% of his Estonian customers now prefer medium to spicy dishes. Increased exposure to global cuisine and awareness of Indian spices' health benefits have driven this change. In Tartu's competitive market (22–25 Indian/Asian restaurants), he emphasizes that quality, authenticity, and kitchen experience are key to success.

**Captain Taman** who is a proprietor of Mandala Restaurant originally hails from Nepal and moved to Estonia in 2005. In 2014-2015, he opened Mandala Restaurant in Tartu, specializing in Nepalese cuisine. Over the years, he opened multiple restaurants but now focuses solely on Mandala. Mandala serves Nepalese, Chinese, and Thai dishes, with a primary focus on Nepalese food. To cater to local tastes, it offers two menus: a main menu with milder flavors and a special menu featuring highly spicy, authentic Nepalese dishes. Spices are sourced from Finland, Estonia, and Nepal. Estonians increasingly prefer Nepalese dishes like Butter Chicken and Chicken Tikka Masala, which Captain Taman adapts to his style by adjusting spice levels, using locally available ingredients, and simplifying preparation techniques to match Estonian preferences while retaining traditional Nepalese flavors. He also mentioned that his restaurant serves fresh, made to order meals and vegetarian options are also popular.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sanjeev Kapoor (born 10 April 1964) is an Indian celebrity chef, television presenter, and entrepreneur.

To confirm the experiences of owners and chefs I finally gather customer feedback and interviews.

### **3.1.2 Owner Insights**

The operational experiences of restaurant owners in Estonia, particularly those managing Indian and Asian culinary establishments, reveal a range of shared outcomes shaped by common socio-economic, cultural, and logistical factors. Based on fieldwork and interview data, it is evident that despite individual differences in entrepreneurial background, scale of operations, and target clientele, many restaurateurs encounter similar challenges and adopt comparable strategies for sustainability and growth. These include approaches to ingredient sourcing, adaptations to local consumer preferences, the recruitment and training of staff, and the negotiation between culinary authenticity and localization. This section examines these recurring patterns to offer a nuanced understanding of how ethnic restaurateurs navigate the Estonian food industry and contribute to the evolving multicultural gastronomic landscape.

**1. Adaptation to Local Preferences:** Balli Chouhan (Monk Restaurant), Udeya (Vegan Home Kitchen), Mr. Bhandari (Asian Chef by Cayenne), and Captain Taman (Mandala Restaurant) all emphasize the need to adjust spice levels and flavors to suit Estonian tastes making dishes milder yet flavorful. Dual-menu strategies, like at Mandala, help cater to both mild and spicy food preferences.

**2. Cultural and Culinary Influence:** Many owners (e.g., Balli Chouhan, Captain Taman) view their restaurants as a way to share culture, especially through food and festivals like Diwali (Udeya), Ramadan dinners (Balli). Diwali is a Hindu festival of lights celebrating the victory of good over evil. The Indian Association in Estonia and some private individuals organise these events as an attempt to make these Indian festivals more international. People light lamps, decorate their homes, perform prayers, share sweets, and enjoy fireworks. Shared culture in this context refers to how Indian restaurants like Monk create spaces for cultural exchange, such as hosting Iftar events during Ramadan. These gatherings bring together members of the Muslim diaspora, fostering a sense of community. However, the low participation of Estonians highlights the limits of such events in bridging broader cultural divides, showing that while food can be a medium for connection, deeper intercultural engagement may still be limited.

**3. Ingredient Quality & Sourcing:** Many restaurant owners and chefs emphasize the importance of maintaining flavor consistency and cultural depth by carefully selecting spices and ingredients. These are often sourced from India, Nepal, or other countries, though some local or regional alternatives are also used to meet availability and customer preferences.

Mr. Udeya (Home Kitchen, Tartu) brings most of his spices directly from India, often through personal visits or help from friends, ensuring freshness and familiarity with Indian cooking styles.

- Captain Taman (Mandala Restaurant, Tartu) sources spices from Nepal and Finland, and occasionally from Indian grocery stores in Estonia. He also stocks specialty items like black cardamom in small quantities for select dishes.
- Chef Rajesh (Monk, Kuressaare) mentions that while vegetables and meats are mostly sourced locally in Estonia, spices are selectively imported. The restaurant even makes fresh paneer in-house to maintain control over quality.
- Mr. Bhandari (Asian Chef, Tartu) confirms that while availability has improved significantly, their kitchen still prefers high-grade ingredients, especially spices, which are key to preserving depth of flavor.

### 3.2 Chefs Insights Objectives

The interviews focused on the following key areas:

- **Ingredient Sourcing and Adapting to Local Availability**  
One of the primary concerns highlighted by the chefs was the availability of traditional Indian and Asian ingredients in Estonia. Essential spices, herbs, and specific raw materials are often difficult to source locally, leading to a reliance on imports. To address this, chefs discussed various strategies such as partnering with international suppliers, modifying recipes to suit available ingredients while retaining core flavors, and experimenting with local substitutes that align with customer expectations. These adaptations help ensure that dishes remain flavorful, appealing, and culturally grounded, even when exact original ingredients are not accessible.
- **Menu Adaptations to Suit Local Tastes While Preserving Traditional Flavors**  
The chefs acknowledged that while there is a growing demand for Indian and Asian

cuisine, customer preferences vary significantly. Estonian diners often prefer milder spice levels and subtle flavors, which has influenced menu adaptations. The chefs at Monk Restaurant and Monk Kuressaare have tailored their offerings to include both traditional and localized variations of dishes, allowing customers to choose their preferred spice intensity. This strategy helps in broadening their customer base while ensuring that authentic flavors remain accessible to those familiar with Indian and Asian cuisine.

- **Culinary Techniques and Innovations in Food Preparation**

The integration of modern cooking techniques with traditional methods was another key area of discussion. The chefs shared how they utilize contemporary kitchen technology such as precision temperature control and modern plating techniques to enhance both the service efficiency and presentation of their dishes. They also emphasized the importance of retaining fundamental cooking processes, such as slow-cooking curries, using the tandoor for bread and grilled meats, and preparing spice blends in-house to maintain flavor integrity.

- **The Influence of Estonian Food Culture on Indian and Asian Restaurant Menus**

Estonian food culture has played a significant role in shaping the menu offerings of Indian and Asian restaurants. The chefs noted that Estonian customers prefer well-balanced meals with lighter, less oily preparations. This has led to modifications in cooking styles, such as using less ghee or oil, offering grilled options instead of deep-fried dishes, and incorporating locally sourced fresh produce into Indian and Asian recipes. Additionally, fusion dishes that blend Indian and Asian flavors with Estonian ingredients have been introduced to create unique offerings that appeal to a wider audience. Examples of such adaptations include **Grilled Butter Chicken**, which reduces oil content while retaining rich flavor; **Dal Soup**, a lighter take on traditional lentils suited for local tastes; **Honey Potato** Crispy fried potatoes in honey sauce, **Chicken Shashlik** with grilled chicken with baked potatoes and fresh salad and **Tandoori Chicken Pizza**, a creative fusion dish that combines Indian spices with a familiar Western format.

Through these discussions, the study identifies how chefs navigate the balance between cultural authenticity and market demands, ensuring that Indian and Asian cuisine continues to thrive in Estonia. Their experiences highlight the ongoing evolution of

culinary practices, customer engagement strategies, and creative adaptations that define the success of ethnic restaurants in a foreign market.

### **3.2.1 Profiles of Chefs**

#### **Mahendra Gopal Khaire – Head Chef at Monk**

Mumbai-born Mahendra Gopal Khaire moved to Estonia in 2002 after working in five-star hotels, including the Taj. With 27 years of experience, including 22 years in Estonia in Maharaja Restaurant and Monk Restaurant.

To cater to Estonian tastes, he adapted traditional Indian and Chinese cuisine, making dishes milder and slightly sweeter. He sees Asian fusion cuisine as a growing trend in Estonia due to its affordability, fresh ingredients, and rising demand. While Dal Tadka (A traditional Indian Dish - Lentils, Beans and Chickpeas remains his personal favorite, dishes like Butter Chicken and Honey Chicken are more popular among local customers, reflecting a blend of traditional Indian flavors with local taste preferences. His passion for culinary innovation illustrates how Indian cuisine in Estonia is evolving through hybrid adaptations that balance authenticity with the expectations of a diverse, local audience.

#### **Rajesh – Head Chef at Monk, Kuressaare**

With 20+ years of experience in India's food industry, Rajesh joined Monk Restaurant early on and is now the Head Chef in Kuressaare, Saaremaa. Since Monk's opening, the menu has expanded from Indian cuisine to include Chinese wok dishes, sushi, and pizza (available in select locations).

Estonian customers prefer milder flavors, so Monk adjusts spice levels while offering authentic options for those who request them. His experience suggests that over time, Estonians have become more open to spicy food, influenced by global food trends. The demand for vegan dishes has also grown, leading to the introduction of Chana Masala (chickpea curry cooked in a tomato-based sauce), Dal Tadka (A traditional Indian Dish - Lentils, Beans and Chickpeas) and Mix Vegetable curry, with daily vegan lunch "paevaprad" in Saaremaa, Tallinn, and Tartu.

A key challenge in maintaining authenticity is ingredient availability, as many spices and vegetables in Estonia are frozen rather than fresh. Monk sources meat, fish, and

vegetables locally, makes its own paneer, and buys spices from local Asian shops in Estonia.

Popular dishes include Butter Chicken, Chicken Tikka Masala, naan, rice, and Chinese wok dishes like Honey Chicken. On weekends, sushi combos and pizza sets are top sellers. Recently, Monk introduced Korm and Nurani curry (Creamy cashew nut curry), which have become customer favorites. The restaurant continues to balance authenticity with local preferences, making Asian cuisine increasingly popular in Estonia.

### **3.2.2 Chef Insights (Monk Restaurants)**

This section highlights common themes shared by chefs at Monk restaurants, focusing on authenticity, adaptation, and local taste preferences.

- **Adaptation to Local Tastes:**

Both chefs modify traditional Indian and Asian dishes to suit Estonian preferences—less spicy and slightly sweeter.

- **Growing Preference for Authentic Flavours:**

Estonians are gradually becoming more open to spicier, authentic versions of dishes due to global food trends.

- **Popular Dishes:**

Butter Chicken, Chicken Tikka Masala, Dal Tadka, Honey Chicken, naan, and rice are consistently favored by customers. New items like Korma and Nurani curry are gaining popularity.

- **Vegan & Health-Conscious Options:**

Increased demand for vegan dishes (e.g., Paneer Butter Masala, Chana Masala, Aloo Gobi) has led to daily vegan specials in some branches.

- **Ingredient Challenges:**

Fresh spices and vegetables are hard to find locally; chefs use frozen substitutes, import spices, and make paneer in-house.

- **Menu Diversification & Fusion Trend:**

Several restaurants have expanded their menus to include items such as sushi, Chinese wok dishes, and even pizza in order to attract a broader and more diverse customer base. Some establishments maintain two separate menus, one offering traditional, spicy dishes that reflect culinary authenticity, and another featuring fusion or milder options tailored to local tastes and preferences.

- **Rising Popularity of Asian Cuisine:**

Affordability, freshness, and variety contribute to the increasing appeal of Asian restaurants in Estonia.

### 3.3 Customer Interaction

Preliminary interviews with customers reveal that Asian restaurants are frequently chosen for their cultural appeal, offering an opportunity to explore new culinary traditions and diverse flavors. A common motivation among respondents is the desire for variety and an alternative to typical Estonian cuisine, with Asian menus providing a wide spectrum of options ranging from mild to highly spiced dishes. Several participants noted their inability to replicate such dishes at home, citing the specialized skills and authentic ingredients used by trained chefs. Specific items, such as sushi at Monk, were highlighted for their favorable taste and relative affordability. Furthermore, the use of bold spices and unique ingredients such as ginger, tofu, and seaweed was particularly appealing to those interested in health-conscious and novel food experiences. The aesthetic environment, including vibrant décor and traditional music, was also recognized as enhancing the overall dining atmosphere. Social influences, such as recommendations from friends, and nostalgic associations with previous travel to Asian countries, also play a role in restaurant selection. Additionally, respondents appreciated the quick and fresh service, generous portion sizes, vegetarian-friendly menus, and cost-effectiveness. Collectively, these factors contribute to the growing popularity of Asian restaurants among local diners

**An Asian student**, residing in Estonia since 2023 and currently studying at the University of Tartu, highlighted a deep emotional and cultural connection to Asian restaurants in the country. The student noted that the primary motivation for frequenting these establishments lies in the familiar flavours and aromas that evoke memories of home. Dining at such venues offers a sense of comfort, happiness, and belonging, effectively

functioning as a cultural bridge within a foreign environment. Dishes such as butter chicken and biryani were cited as especially meaningful, as they are strongly associated with familial gatherings and traditional meals, reinforcing both cultural identity and personal nostalgia.

While acknowledging that the food served in Estonia is not entirely identical to that found in their home country, the student interprets authenticity not as exact replication, but as the ability of the food to elicit emotional and sensory familiarity. This understanding of authenticity aligns with scholarly perspectives on transnational belonging and the role of food in identity formation, where emotional resonance often outweighs culinary precision (Lu & Fine, 1995; Sutton, 2001).

The student also emphasized the social aspect of dining, expressing a preference for visiting restaurants with friends, as shared meals enhance the overall experience. Visits typically occur once or twice a week, especially during periods of homesickness. Additionally, the student highlighted the importance of ambiance, noting that a cozy and welcoming atmosphere significantly enhances dining satisfaction. Ultimately, the student expressed a strong willingness to recommend Asian restaurants in Estonia, viewing them as meaningful spaces for engaging with both authentic and locally adapted culinary traditions.

**A family of** Indian origin, currently residing in Tallinn, Estonia, offers insightful perspectives on the role of Asian restaurants in shaping leisure and family bonding experiences within a migrant household. Both the husband and wife are professionals working in the IT sector, and given their demanding work schedules during the week, dining out at Asian restaurants on weekends has become a valued family ritual. These outings serve as a means of relaxation and a culturally enriching activity, allowing them to reconnect not only with one another but also with their culinary heritage.

The family described their experiences at Asian restaurants in Estonia as consistently positive, citing the combination of flavorful food, hospitable service, and welcoming ambiance as key elements that enhance their dining experiences. These outings are not merely about convenience or sustenance; rather, they represent meaningful family events where shared meals become opportunities for emotional connection and the preservation of cultural identity in a foreign setting.

The couple's children, having previously traveled to India, have developed a strong emotional and sensory attachment to traditional Indian flavors particularly curries which they now associate with those formative travel experiences. Dishes such as chicken tikka masala are especially favored by the children, while the husband, described as a food enthusiast, expresses particular appreciation for bolder options like spicy lamb curry. The wife prefers more traditional and comforting items such as freshly prepared naan bread and dal tadka, which evoke a sense of home and familiarity.

Atmosphere is an important factor in the family's restaurant selection. They consistently seek venues that offer a cozy yet vibrant setting, as the right ambiance is seen as central to creating memorable experiences. The overall environment, including friendly staff and aesthetically pleasing decor, plays a crucial role in shaping their perception of quality and hospitality. Such spaces allow the family to unwind, converse, and enjoy each other's company away from the pressures of daily routines.

Asian restaurants are also viewed by the family as highly accommodating to children, with menus that offer a wide variety of options to cater to different age groups and taste preferences. This inclusivity enhances the overall appeal of these establishments, positioning them as ideal venues for family outings. The family typically visits Asian restaurants twice a month, often aligning their visits with weekends and special occasions such as birthdays or cultural celebrations.

In conclusion, the family strongly endorses Asian restaurants in Estonia for other families, emphasizing their ability to provide an enriching, enjoyable, and culturally resonant experience for both adults and children. These outings serve not only as a means of culinary enjoyment but also as a valuable tool for maintaining cultural continuity and fostering family unity in a diasporic context.

**An IT professional** of Pakistani origin, currently residing in Tartu, Estonia, presents a compelling example of how Asian restaurants serve as important cultural and social spaces for migrants. Having initially arrived in Estonia as an international student during the 2019–2020 academic year, he has since transitioned into full-time professional employment. His lived experience highlights the multifaceted role that Asian cuisine plays not only in maintaining a connection to his cultural roots but also in facilitating professional integration and social cohesion in a foreign environment.

He emphasizes that Asian restaurants, particularly those offering South Asian cuisine such as chicken tikka masala, provide a profound sense of comfort and familiarity. As someone who travels frequently for work, these dining spaces offer more than just food—they function as informal cultural anchors that alleviate feelings of displacement and foster a sense of belonging. The emotional resonance of familiar tastes and aromas makes these restaurants a preferred choice for leisure, as well as professional engagement.

Interestingly, his Estonian friends often recommend Asian restaurants, suggesting that the appeal of these establishments extends well beyond the diaspora community. This cross-cultural endorsement further reflects the growing mainstream popularity and acceptance of Asian cuisine within Estonian society. The professional notes that he frequently selects Asian restaurants for informal business meetings, team lunches, and networking events. The atmosphere of these venues, often vibrant yet relaxed, creates an inviting setting conducive to both casual interaction and collaborative discussion.

The universality of Asian cuisine, in terms of both flavor and presentation, is another factor contributing to its suitability for diverse gatherings. The shared enjoyment of flavorful dishes often acts as a social equalizer, breaking down cultural and hierarchical barriers within professional settings. He finds that food can serve as an effective conversation starter, helping to build rapport among colleagues from different cultural backgrounds.

On average, he dines at Asian restaurants approximately three times a week, either with colleagues or friends. Lunchtime visits are especially common, with daily specials (“päevapraad”) providing a convenient and affordable option. In addition to dining in, he frequently uses online food delivery platforms such as Wolt and Bolt to order from Asian restaurants, indicating the high demand and adaptability of these services to modern, tech-savvy lifestyles.

He expresses particular appreciation for the consistently high quality of food and the diverse offerings typically found on the menus of Asian eateries in Tartu. Although his visits are primarily work-related, he also enjoys occasional casual outings with friends. Overall, he strongly recommends Asian restaurants as ideal venues for professional engagements. In his view, these spaces skillfully balance informality and sophistication,

making them conducive to productive dialogue, cross-cultural interaction, and collaborative networking.

### 3.4 Comparative Insights: Culinary Perspectives from Restaurateurs and Customers

An integrated analysis of customer interviews including responses from an international student, a local family, an IT professional, and general diners—alongside earlier findings from chefs and owners, reveals overlapping yet distinct perspectives on the evolving role of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia. Rather than simply confirming their popularity, this subchapter offers a more nuanced comparison of the motivations, challenges, and perceptions that shape these culinary spaces.

A shared theme across both restaurateurs and customers is the **importance of cultural authenticity and adaptation**. Chefs and owners emphasized their continuous negotiation between preserving traditional cooking techniques and catering to local palates, often modifying spice levels or presentation to align with Estonian expectations. Similarly, customers valued the sense of cultural richness embedded in the dining experience though their understanding of “authenticity” was more emotional than technical. For example, the Asian student perceived authenticity not as strict replication, but as the capacity of the food to evoke memories, comfort, and belonging—an interpretation supported by literature on food and transnational identity (Lu & Fine, 1995; Sutton, 2001).

While chefs prioritized ingredient authenticity and culinary innovation (e.g., importing key spices, developing hybrid dishes, or managing labor shortages), customers more frequently associated quality with **flavour, ambiance, and emotional satisfaction**. Popular dishes such as butter chicken, biryani, chicken tikka masala, and sushi were highlighted by interviewees for their sensory appeal and depth of flavor. However, customers also admitted challenges in replicating these dishes at home, which echoed chefs’ commentary on the difficulty of sourcing key ingredients and replicating traditional techniques in a new environment.

**Health and wellness** emerged as another point of intersection. Restaurateurs noted a growing demand for vegetarian, vegan, and health-conscious options. Customers echoed this, appreciating the use of fresh herbs, lean proteins, and minimally processed

ingredients in Asian cuisines. However, while owners framed these choices as strategic adaptations to a changing market, customers viewed them more as personal dietary values.

**Emotional and symbolic associations** with food were more pronounced among customers. The international student described restaurants as emotional anchors during homesickness, while local families viewed them as nostalgic or recreational spaces recalling international travel. IT professionals appreciated the informal, social nature of these venues, which support both team-building and relaxed professional engagement. These interpretations were less emphasized by chefs, who were more focused on operational aspects such as consistency, pricing, and staff training—though they acknowledged the emotional resonance of food as a factor in customer retention.

**Ambiance and setting** were consistently valued by both groups. Restaurateurs invested in décor, music, and lighting to create an immersive experience, while customers described these features as vital to transforming a routine meal into a meaningful event. This mutual recognition underscores the performative and atmospheric dimensions of dining that extend beyond the plate.

From a practical perspective, both stakeholders recognized **affordability, digital accessibility, and efficient service** as key factors in sustaining customer interest. Features such as lunch specials (“pāevapraad”), vegetarian options, and platforms like Wolt and Bolt were frequently mentioned. However, while restaurateurs framed these as strategic tools for customer acquisition and retention, diners simply appreciated them for their convenience and value.

### **Synthesis of Key Thematic Overlaps and Divergences**

To provide a more coherent comparison between stakeholders, the following thematic areas originally used to structure the interviews with owners and chefs are revisited here in light of customer responses:

- **Authenticity vs. Adaptation:** Restaurateurs aim to preserve culinary integrity while adjusting to local preferences. Customers perceive authenticity emotionally, often accepting local adaptation if the experience feels familiar or nostalgic.

- **Ingredient Sourcing and Menu Design:** Owners emphasize the logistical and financial challenges of acquiring authentic ingredients. Customers recognize the complexity and uniqueness of dishes, noting difficulty in recreating them at home.
- **Ambiance and Service:** Both groups agree that ambiance contributes significantly to overall satisfaction. Restaurateurs design spaces to reflect cultural heritage, while customers appreciate these efforts as enhancing social or emotional connection.
- **Emotional and Social Functions:** For diners, emotional resonance and social engagement are central to the experience. Restaurateurs are aware of these needs but tend to focus more on operational success and cultural representation.
- **Health and Inclusivity:** Owners introduce inclusive menus to accommodate various dietary needs. Customers appreciate these offerings, especially when combined with flavor and nutritional value.

In nutshell, rather than positioning Asian and Indian restaurants in Estonia as merely "popular," this analysis emphasizes their role as dynamic, adaptive spaces shaped by the interactions between diaspora entrepreneurs and a diverse, evolving customer base. The perspectives of chefs and owners reveal how strategic adaptations, cultural expression, and business constraints shape the culinary landscape. In contrast, customer interviews highlight emotional attachment, symbolic meaning, and experiential value. By bringing these views into conversation, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of how culinary authenticity, transnational identity, and local adaptation converge in shaping Estonia's multicultural foodscape—offering a grounded response to the thesis's core research questions.

## CONCLUSION

This Master's thesis aimed to map the existing landscape of Indian and select Asian restaurants in Estonia and assess their positioning within the national food culture. The findings indicate that these establishments are predominantly concentrated in Tallinn and Tartu, where demographic diversity and increased international influence have fostered an environment conducive to culinary diversification. These restaurants function not only as commercial enterprises but also as important cultural sites where culinary traditions are preserved, adapted, and disseminated, thereby contributing to the ongoing multicultural transformation of Estonia's gastronomic identity.

A central objective was to examine the strategic approaches employed by Indian restaurateurs and chefs to balance culinary authenticity with local adaptation. Interviews conducted with chefs and owners of Indian and Asian restaurants in Tartu and Kuressaare revealed that they often modify traditional recipes adjusting spice levels, substituting unavailable ingredients, and adapting cooking techniques to align with local tastes, while conscientiously maintaining the fundamental characteristics of Indian cuisine. This adaptive strategy reflects a pragmatic negotiation between cultural preservation and market responsiveness, facilitating both cultural continuity and economic viability.

To analyze the perceptions and dining experiences of Estonian customers, the study explored how authenticity is constructed and experienced across diverse demographic groups. It was found that perceptions of authenticity are multifaceted and not strictly tied to culinary replication. Many Estonian consumers, particularly younger and internationally exposed individuals, demonstrate an increasing openness to traditional and spicier Indian dishes. For these consumers, authenticity is mediated through sensory engagement, cultural resonance, and the overall dining experience rather than rigid adherence to traditional recipes.

**The study also identified key operational, economic, and cultural factors influencing the sustainability and success of Indian restaurants in Estonia.** Notably, challenges such as limited access to authentic ingredients, cost constraints, competitive market pressures, and pricing strategies were prevalent. Conversely, the rise of digital platforms including food delivery services, social media, and online review systems—has

introduced significant opportunities for customer outreach, brand development, and business growth, enabling restaurateurs to effectively navigate an increasingly digitalized marketplace.

The historical and contemporary significance of spices in shaping the culinary identity of Indian cuisine within the Estonian context was also examined. Despite adjustments in intensity to accommodate local palates, spices remain central to the flavor profile and cultural authenticity of Indian dishes. Their selective use not only preserves culinary tradition but also functions as a symbolic marker of cultural identity, thereby enhancing the distinctiveness of Indian cuisine within Estonia's diverse culinary landscape.

In conclusion, the evolution of Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia exemplifies broader processes of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and globalization. These establishments serve as dynamic sites of intercultural exchange, economic participation, and social cohesion. As Estonia's society becomes increasingly diverse and globally interconnected, such restaurants are likely to assume greater significance, functioning as both commercial ventures and critical spaces for cultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

Future research may benefit from further investigation into the economic contributions of ethnic restaurants to local economies, their influence on domestic culinary practices, and comparative analyses across Northern and Eastern European contexts. From a policy perspective, initiatives such as targeted funding for immigrant entrepreneurs, streamlined visa procedures for skilled chefs, and the institutionalization of cultural food festivals could foster sectoral growth and enhance intercultural engagement. These measures have the potential to reinforce the sustainability of ethnic restaurants while promoting broader societal appreciation for culinary diversity.

Ultimately, Indian and Asian restaurants in Estonia represent a fusion of tradition and modernity, symbolizing the country's engagement with global cultural flows. Their continued development reflects Estonia's evolving multicultural landscape and underscores the significant role of food as a medium for cultural expression, economic opportunity, and social integration.

## Resümees

Magistritöö „India ja Aasia restoranid Eestis: Autentsus ja hübriidsus“ uurib India ja Aasia restorane Eestis, keskendudes sellele, kuidas ränne, kultuuriline suhtlus ja klientide eelistused kujundavad kulinaarseid tavasid. Magistritöö põhineb vaatlustel ja intervjuudel valitud restoranide omanike, kokkade ja klientidega Tartus ja Kuressaares.

Magistritöö koosneb kolmest peatükist, millest esimene annab ülevaate terminoloogiast ning India ja Aasia restoranidest Eestis. Kuna võrtsid on india köögi süda ning neid mainita ka intervjuudes palju, antakse 1. peatükis ülevaade ka peamistest võrtsidest ning võrtsikaubanduse ajaloost. Teine peatükk loob teoreetilise raamistiku ja tutvustab töös kasutatud metodoloogiat. Kolmandas peatükis analüüsitakse restoranide omanike, kokkade ja ka väikse hulga klientidega läbiviidud intervjuude tulemusi.

Intervjuudest selgub, et töös käsitletud India ja Aasia restoranid kasutavad klientide ligimeelitamiseks mitmeid strateegiaid: vähendavad toiduõli kogust, mängivad võrtsikuse astmega, lisavad kohalikke toiduaineid. Fusion-köögile omased kohandatud road nagu tandoori kanapizza, grillitud võikana, dal supp, kanašašlõkk ja särisev kanataldrik kõnelevad tasakaalu otsingutest kohalike maitse-eelistuste ja kultuuriidentiteedi vahel.

Magistritöös pälvib teistest restoranipidajatest enam tähelepanu restoranide keti Monk omanik Balli Chouhan, kelle karjäär Eestis illustreerib ühte võimalikku teed Eestisse. Indiast pärit Balli Chouhan tuli Eesti ülikooli õppima 2003. aastal. Läbi raske töö ja pühendumuse tõusis ta köögiabilisest ettevõtjaks, avades esimese restorani Kuressaares 2011. aastal. Aja jooksul on ta laiendanud äri mitmesse linna, sh Jõhvisse, ning on seeläbi toonud India köögi suurema hulga Eesti elanike teadvusesse. Balli Chouhan mitte ainult ei loo töökohti, vaid panustab aktiivselt ühiskonda ka seeläbi, et osaleb heategevuses ja edendab kultuurilist dialoogi. India ja Aasia restoranid Eestis ei ole vaid söögimajad, vaid omamoodi kultuurikeskused, kus Eestisse mujalt sisse rännanud inimesed kohtuvad ja peavad oma tähtpäev, olgu selleks iftar, söömaaeg, mida nauditakse ramadaani ajal päikese loojangul, Diwali pidustused või ka India iseseisvuspäeva tähistamine. Sellised sündmused toovad kokku etnilise vähemuse esindajad, aga aitavad ka enamuse ja vähemuse vahel kontakte luua, edendades nii mitmekultuurilisust.

India köögi kohanemises Eesti maitsete ja oludega peegelduvad üldisemad suundumused tänapäeva maailmas, nagu identiteediprotsessid, hargmaine ettevõtlus ja lõimumise olulisus. Magistritöö aitab mõista, miks ja kuidas toidukultuurid toimivad maailmas, mis on samal ajal globaalsed ja juurtega sügaval kohalikes oludes.

## REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, Minn. : University of Minnesota Press.  
<https://archive.org/details/modernityatlarge0000appa>
- Arvela, Paula. "Ethnic food: the other in ourselves." *Food: Expressions and impressions*. Brill, 2013. 43-56.[https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848882140\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848882140_006)
- Asian | Restaurants | Tallinn. (2025). Asian | Restaurants | Tallinn. Inyourpocket.com.  
<https://www.inyourpocket.com/tallinn/restaurants-in-tallinn-tallinn-restaurant-guide/asian>
- Au, E. (2024). Research on the Development and Comparison of Cuisine in China, India, and Japan. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 200, 02014.  
<https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202420002014>
- Bardone, E., & Kannike, A. (2018). Eating Out and In Between: Observations from the Pop-Up Restaurant Scene in Estonia. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 71, 11–36.  
[https://doi.org/10.7592/fej2018.71.bardone\\_kannike](https://doi.org/10.7592/fej2018.71.bardone_kannike)
- Berry, John W. *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.  
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, May 3). spice trade. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/money/spice-trade>
- Butt, M. S., Naz, A., Sultan, M. T., & Qayyum, M. M. (2013). Anti-oncogenic perspectives of spices/herbs: A comprehensive review. *EXCLI Journal*, 12, 1043–1065.

- Cobas, J. A., Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H., & Ward, R. (1991). Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies. *Contemporary Sociology*, 20(2), 235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2072935>
- Counihan, C., & Penny Van Esterik. (2012). “As Mother Made It”: The Cosmopolitan Indian Family, “Authentic” Food, and the Construction of Cultural Utopia. 369–389. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203079751-36>
- Cox, R. (2013). Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire. *Asian Studies Review*, 37(3), 402–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2013.823845>
- Cox, R. (2013). Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire. *Asian Studies Review*, 37(3), 402–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2013.823845>
- D, S., Yalagala, P. C., B, K., T, K., & Kumar R, S. (2018). Indian Culinary Ethnic Spices Uses in Foods are Palate of Paradise. *Acta Scientific Nutritional Health*, 2, 22–28. <https://actascientific.com/ASNH/pdf/ASNH-02-0112.pdf>.
- Derek M. (2020) Ethnic cuisine in urban space. In: A. Kowalczyk, M. Derek (Eds.), *Gastronomy and Urban Space. Changes and Challenges in Geographical Perspective*, Springer, Cham, pp. 225–237. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34492-4\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34492-4_11)
- Dubey, S. (2017). Indian Spices and their Medicinal Value. *Indian Journal of Pharmaceutical Education and Research*, 51(3s2), s330–s332. <https://doi.org/10.5530/ijper.51.3s.41>
- Ene Kõresaar. (2004). *Memory and History in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Tartu University Press.
- Estonia: A hidden delight for a gastronomic adventure. (2023, November 6). Euronews; Euronews.com. <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/11/06/estonia-a-hidden-delight-for-a-gastronomic-adventure>
- Estonia could become Europe’s gateway for Asian food enthusiasts: Indian business delegation visits Estonia - Trade with Estonia. (2025, May 6). Trade with Estonia. <https://tradewithestonia.com/estonia-could-become-europes-gateway-for-asian-food-enthusiasts-indian-business-delegation-visits-estonia/>

- Estonia: Making the Most of Globalisation. (2025). OECD. [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/estonia-making-the-most-of-globalisation\\_5kg9pkmsmltc-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/estonia-making-the-most-of-globalisation_5kg9pkmsmltc-en.html)
- Farrer, J. (2011). Globalizing Asian Cuisines: From Eating for Strength to Culinary Cosmopolitanism. *Education about Asia* 16 (3), 33–37. [https://www.academia.edu/1131324/Globalizing\\_Asian\\_Cuisines\\_From\\_Eating\\_for\\_Strength\\_to\\_Culinary\\_Cosmopolitanism](https://www.academia.edu/1131324/Globalizing_Asian_Cuisines_From_Eating_for_Strength_to_Culinary_Cosmopolitanism)
- Fielding, S. A. (2014). Curryng Flavor: Authenticity, Cultural Capital, and the Rise of Indian Food in the United Kingdom. *The Paradox of Authenticity in a Globalized World*, 35–52. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137353832\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137353832_4)
- Gabriel, S. (2022, May 24). Veganism In Post-Socialist Estonia - Faunalytics. Faunalytics. <https://faunalytics.org/veganism-in-post-socialist-estonia/>
- Gong, J., Fang, K., Dong, H., Wang, D., Hu, M., & Lu, F. (2016). Effect of fenugreek on hyperglycaemia and hyperlipidemia in diabetes and prediabetes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 194, 260–268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2016.08.003>
- Grand View Research. (2018). Seasoning And Spices Market Size, Share | Industry Report, 2018-2025. Grandviewresearch.com. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/seasonings-spices-market>
- Gupta, R. K., & Balasubrahmanyam, L. (1998). The turmeric effect. *World Patent Information*, 20(3-4), 185–191. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0172-2190\(98\)00045-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0172-2190(98)00045-3)
- Hadacek, F. (2002). Secondary Metabolites as Plant Traits: Current Assessment and Future Perspectives. *Critical Reviews in Plant Sciences*, 21(4), 273–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735-260291044269>
- Heldke, L. (2024). *Exotic Appetites*. Booktopia.com.au; Taylor & Francis Ltd., <https://www.booktopia.com.au/exotic-appetites-lisa-heldke/book/9780415943840.htm>
- Henriques, M. (2019). How spices changed the ancient world. *Www.bbc.com*. <https://www.bbc.com/future/bespoke/made-on-earth/the-flavours-that-shaped-the-world/>

- International Migration Outlook 2024: Estonia. (2024). OECD. [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2024\\_50b0353e-en/full-report/estonia\\_b57fdc01.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2024_50b0353e-en/full-report/estonia_b57fdc01.html)
- Johnston, J., & Baumann, S. (2014). *Foodies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315794600>
- Joseph, E., & Voeks, R. (2021). Indian Diaspora Gastronomy: On the Changing Use of Herbs and Spices Among Southern California's Indian Immigrant Women. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2021.610081>
- Kannike, A., & Bardone, E. (2021). Negotiating Food Heritage Interpretations: Experiences of a Project at the Estonian National Museum. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 15(2), 112–134. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jef-2021-0020>
- Kakilla, Charles. (2021). Strengths and Weaknesses of Semi-Structured Interviews in Qualitative Research: A Critical Essay. 10.20944/preprints202106.0491.v1.
- Karaosmanoğlu, D. (2020). How to study ethnic food: senses, power, and intercultural studies. *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 7, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-020-00049-1>
- Krishnaswamy, K. (2008). Traditional Indian spices and their health significance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 17 Suppl 1, 265–268. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18296352/>
- Light, I. H. (2021). "Chapter 37: Global entrepreneurship and transnationalism". In *World Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved May 13, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839104145.00044>
- Liu, S. Q., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). Ethnic dining: Need to belong, need to be unique, and menu offering. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 49, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.04.010>
- Lu, S., & Fine, G. A. (1995). The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36(3), 535–553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00452.x>

- Lu, S., & Fine, G. A. (1995). The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment, *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, (3), 535–553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00452.x>
- Maheshwari, V. (2015, June). Tallinn Tandoori. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/estonia-curry-houses/>
- Malhotra, S. K. Cherian, H., Meena, B., Kumar, M., Sreekumar, S.(2021). Spices Statistics at a Glance 2021, UBSN-978-93-5526-979-9, pp. 1–164.
- Narayan, U. (1995). Eating cultures: Incorporation, identity and Indian food. *Social Identities*, 1(1), 63–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.1995.9959426>
- NEBC. (2022, August 9). The Oldest Indian Restaurant in Estonia || An Indian Restaurant menu || NEBC हिंदी. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqufjUYlc24>
- Polese, A., Seliverstova, O., Kerikmae, T., & Cheskin, A. (2020). National Identity for Breakfast: Food Consumption and the Everyday Construction of National Narratives in Estonia. *Nationalities Papers*, 48, 1015–1035. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.131>
- Rathore, M. S. R., & Shekhawat, N. S. (2008). Incredible Spices of India: from Traditions to Cuisine. *American-Eurasian Journal of Botany*, 1(3), 85–89. [https://www.idosi.org/aejb/1\(3\)08/4.pdf](https://www.idosi.org/aejb/1(3)08/4.pdf).
- Ravindran, P. N. (2023). Spices: Definition, Classification, History, and Role in Indian Life. 1–102. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-3728-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-3728-6_1)
- Rausing, S. (2010). *History, memory, and identity in post-Soviet Estonia: the end of a collective farm*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- Ray, K. (2004). *Meals And Memories* In. Temple University Press; JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt14bsxzt>
- Reddy, G., & van Dam, R. M. (2020). Food, culture, and identity in multicultural societies: Insights from singapore. *Appetite*, 149, 104633. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2020.104633>

Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38(1), 149–152. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1936.38.1.02a00330>

Sankar, A. (2017). Creation of Indian–Chinese cuisine: Chinese food in an Indian city. *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 4(4), 268–273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jef.2017.10.002>.

Sangwon, S., Jung, & Analytics. (2021). How Consumer Perceptions Affect Ethnic Restaurant Location Patterns. [https://www.bu.edu/bhr/files/2021/11/BHR\\_Jung\\_Ethnic-Restaurants\\_DEC.21.docx-3.pdf](https://www.bu.edu/bhr/files/2021/11/BHR_Jung_Ethnic-Restaurants_DEC.21.docx-3.pdf)

Sattarzadeh, N., Tsiami, A., Maxim, C., & Iordanova, E. (2023). Awareness and perceptions of ethnic restaurant managers towards authenticity and sensory strategies – A case study of Persian ethnic restaurants in London. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 32, 100679. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100679>

Schiller, N. G., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645, 1–24. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285339451\\_Towards\\_a\\_Transnational\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Migration\\_Race\\_Class\\_Ethnicity\\_and\\_Nationalism\\_Reconsidered](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285339451_Towards_a_Transnational_Perspective_on_Migration_Race_Class_Ethnicity_and_Nationalism_Reconsidered)

Shah, J. P., Simon, C., & Dietz, A. (2024). The changing role of surgery in head and neck oncology. *Academia Oncology*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.20935/AcadOnco7372>

Sharangi, A.B., Acharya, S.K. (2018). Spices in India and Beyond: The Origin, History, Tradition and Culture. In: Sharangi, A. (eds) *Indian Spices*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75016-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75016-3_1)

“The 19 Best Indian Foods and Restaurants in Tallinn.” *Wanderlog*, 10 Apr. 2025, [wanderlog.com/list/geoCategory/761759/best-indian-foods-and-restaurants-in-tallinn](https://wanderlog.com/list/geoCategory/761759/best-indian-foods-and-restaurants-in-tallinn). Accessed 11 May 2025

The Silk Road Spice Merchant. (2017). *History of the Spice Trade*. The Silk Road Spice Merchant. <https://silkroadspices.ca/pages/history-of-the-spice-trade>

Tripadvisor. (2025). Tripadvisor. [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g274958-c24-Tallinn\\_Harju\\_County.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g274958-c24-Tallinn_Harju_County.html)

Turner, J. (2015, November 2). The Spice That Built Venice. Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/spice-trade-pepper-venice-180956856>

Verma, R. K., Kumari, P., Maurya, R. K., Kumar, V., Verma, R., & Singh, R. K. (2018). Medicinal properties of turmeric (*Curcuma longa* L.): A review. *International Journal of Chemical Studies*, 6(4), 1354–1357.

Viswanathan, S. (2023). Spices Board. Retrieved from [www.indianspices.com](http://www.indianspices.com) website: <https://www.indianspices.com>

Warde, A. (2017). Krishnendu Ray, 2016, *The ethnic restaurateur*. *Review of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Studies*, 98(1-2), 105–109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41130-017-0045-6>

Weber, Cooper. “What Is Fusion Cuisine?” <https://www.escoffier.edu/>, 4 Apr. 2025, [www.escoffier.edu/blog/world-food-drink/whats-the-status-of-fusion-cuisine/](http://www.escoffier.edu/blog/world-food-drink/whats-the-status-of-fusion-cuisine/). Accessed 1 Mar. 2025.

Welcome to the department of commerce, Government of India. (2019). [Commerce.gov.in](http://commerce.gov.in). <https://commerce.gov.in>

Wikipedia Contributors. (2019, May 12). Indian cuisine. Wikipedia; Wikimedia Foundation. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_cuisine)

Yatharth Chauhan, Ishan Negi, & Mandeep Singh. (2025). Cultural identity and Globalization in Culinary Practices: Exploring the Evolution, Diversity and Socioeconomic Impact of Food and Cuisine Across Cultures. *International Journal for Multidimensional Research Perspectives*, 3(1), 08-22. <https://doi.org/10.61877/ijmrp.v3i1.225>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Major Indian spices and their origin.

(based on Viswanathan, S. 2023, Ministry of Commerce & Industry Government of India. 2024, Sharangi & Acharya 2018).

Spices	Origin	Specifications
<b>Black Pepper</b>	Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu	Black pepper, the "King of Spices," is a key Indian export.
<b>Cardamom</b>	Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, West Bengal, Karnataka	India is a major exporter of green and black cardamom, valued for its aroma in food, beverages, and perfumes.
<b>Turmeric</b>	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Kerala, Bihar, etc.	India leads in turmeric production and export, prized for its color, medicinal uses.in cooking, cosmetics, and health products.
<b>Ginger</b>	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Mizoram, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, etc.	India is a major producer of ginger, which is exported in both fresh and dried forms.
<b>Coriander</b>	Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra	India exports coriander, valued for its citrusy flavor in global cuisines.
<b>Cumin</b>	Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh	India is the leading cumin producer and exporter, known globally for its distinct flavor..
<b>Chili</b>	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, etc.	India exports various dried red chilies, valued worldwide for their heat and rich color.
<b>Fennel</b>	Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	India exports fennel seeds, widely used as a spice in Middle

		Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine.
<b>Fenugreek:</b>	Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat.	India exports fenugreek seeds and powder, known for their bitter flavor in global cuisine.
<b>Mustard Seeds:</b>	Himachal Pradesh	India exports mustard seeds for use in mustard condiments and as a spice in various dishes worldwide.

## Appendix 2: Interview details of restaurant owners

Date	Interviewee/Place	Description
06-01-2025	Balli Chouhan, Owner and proprietor of Monk Restaurant Kuressaare, Saaremaa.	Restaurant owners were approached through direct visits, emails, and phone calls. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, emphasizing its academic nature and confidentiality. Most interviews were conducted in person at their establishments, allowing for open and comfortable conversations.
11-01-2025	Udeya, Proprietor of Vegen (Home Kitchen), Tartu	
21-01-2025	Ramhari Bhandari, Owner of Asian Chef by Cayenne, Tartu	
05-02-2025	Captain Taman	

### Interview Questions for Restaurant Owners.

#### 1. Restaurant Background

- When did you start this restaurant, and what inspired you to open it?
- What do you think makes your restaurant special?

#### 2. Indian Food and Dishes

- How do you choose which Indian dishes to have on your menu?
- Do you focus on a specific type of Indian food?
- Are there any dishes that Estonian customers really enjoy?

#### 3. Spices and Flavors

- Do you change the spice levels or flavors to suit local tastes?
- Are there certain Indian spices or flavors that Estonian customers like the most?
- Overall, what spice level Estonians are expecting in their dishes (add in percentage)

Low spicy      mild spicy      high spicy

- How do you introduce customers to new spices or flavors?

#### 4. Indian Themes and Decor

- What Indian elements or designs do you use in the restaurant's decor?
- How do you make the restaurant feel like an authentic Indian experience?
- Do you think the decor and theme help bring in more customers?

#### 5. Customer Support and Interaction

- How does your staff help customers understand Indian food and culture?
- Do you give recommendations for people new to Indian food?
- How do you handle customer feedback, and what do you do to keep customers happy?

#### 6. Customer Preferences and Experience

- What kind of experience do Estonian customers expect in an Indian restaurant?
- Do Estonian customers prefer certain dishes or dining styles?
- What feedback do you hear most often from Estonian customers?

#### 7. Advice and Insights

- How do you think Estonians feel about Indian food, and what trends do you see for the future?
- What challenges have you faced in promoting Indian food, and how did you overcome them?
- What is your food quality rate out of 100 %

#### 8. Anything Else

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your restaurant or your experiences?

### Appendix 3: Interview details of restaurant Chefs

Date	Interviewee/Place	Description
02-02-2025	Mahendra Gopal Khaire – Head Chef at Monk. Tartu	Chefs were approached during restaurant visits or through referrals by owners. Interviews were held during off-peak hours, focusing on their culinary background, recipe adaptation, and work experiences in Estonia.
15-02-2025	Rajesh – Head Chef at Monk, Kuressaare	

### Interview Questionnaire for Estonian Chef on Indian Cuisine's Appeal in Estonia

#### Section 1: Chef's Background

1. Could you tell me about your culinary background? How long have you been working as a chef?
2. What led you to start working with Indian cuisine, and how did you gain experience in it?
3. Do you have any formal training in Indian cooking, or did you learn on the job?

#### Section 2: Popularity and Appeal of Indian Cuisine in Estonia

4. In your opinion, how popular is Indian food among Estonian citizens?
5. What age groups seem most interested in trying Indian food?
6. Are there any specific Indian dishes that Estonian customers request or enjoy the most? Why do you think these dishes are popular?
7. How often do you see repeat customers, and do they tend to order the same dishes or explore different ones?

#### Section 3: Adapting Indian Cuisine to Local Tastes

8. Have you made any modifications to traditional Indian recipes to suit local tastes? If so, what changes do you commonly make?
9. Are there any particular ingredients that are difficult to source in Estonia? If so, how do you work around this?
10. Have you noticed any preferences among Estonian customers for certain spice levels or flavors in Indian dishes?

#### Section 4: Perception and Challenges

11. What do you think are the main reasons why Estonian people might hesitate to try Indian food?
12. Are there common misconceptions about Indian cuisine among Estonians? If so, could you share some examples?
13. What challenges do you face in preparing or serving Indian cuisine in Estonia?

#### Section 5: Indian and Estonian Food Culture (If the Chef is an Indian Citizen or has an Indian food cultural experience).

14. What are the main differences between Indian and Estonian food cultures in your opinion?
15. How do you think the cooking techniques and flavors of Indian cuisine compare with traditional Estonian cooking methods?
16. Are there any similarities between Indian and Estonian cuisine that you've noticed?
17. How do Estonian customers react to the concept of shared or family-style dining, which is common in Indian culture?
18. Do you feel there's potential for a fusion between Indian and Estonian cuisine? If so, could you give examples of how these food cultures could come together?

#### Section 6: Growth and Future Potential

19. Do you see Indian cuisine growing in popularity in Estonia? Why or why not?
20. How do you think Indian cuisine can be promoted more effectively among Estonian citizens?
21. Are there any specific trends you've noticed in the dining preferences of Estonians that could impact the popularity of Indian cuisine?

#### Section 7: Personal Insights and Reflections

22. What is your favorite Indian dish to prepare, and why?
23. How do you stay updated on trends and new techniques in Indian cuisine?
24. Do you have a favorite Estonian dish? If so, how does it compare to the Indian dishes you prepare?

#### Section 8: Final Thoughts

25. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience cooking Indian food for Estonian customers?

## Appendix 4: Customer Interaction

Date	Interviewee/Place	Description
26-03-2025	Asian student University Of Tartu	The Asian student was approached via university networks; the Indian family through community referrals; and the Pakistani IT professional through professional networking platforms. Each interview focused on their dining habits, cultural preferences, and experiences with Asian restaurants in Estonia.
29-03-2025	Indian family Residing @ Tallinn	
15-03-2025	Pakistani IT professional Residing @ Tartu	

### Questionnaire for Customers

#### 1. Demographic Information:

- Nationality: Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you been living in Estonia?
  - Less than 6 months
  - 6 months – 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - Over 3 years
  - Tourist/Short-term visitor

#### 2. Indian/Asian Cuisine Experience

- How often do you eat Indian cuisine?
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - Rarely
  - Never
- What is your level of familiarity with Indian dishes?
  - Very familiar
  - Somewhat familiar

- Not familiar
- Which type of Indian food do you prefer the most?
  - North Indian (e.g., Butter Chicken, Naan)
  - South Indian (e.g., Dosa, Idli)
  - Both
  - Not sure
- Which Indian dishes have you tried before? (Select all that apply)
  - Chicken Tikka Masala
  - Butter Chicken
  - Biryani
  - Samosa
  - Paneer Dishes
  - Dosa/Idli
  - Indian Sweets (e.g., Gulab Jamun)
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your preferred level of spiciness in Indian food?
  - Mild
  - Medium
  - Spicy
  - Extra Spicy
- What do you enjoy most about Indian cuisine?
  - Flavor/Spices
  - Variety of Dishes
  - Authenticity
  - Vegetarian/Vegan Options
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Dining Preferences & Experience in Estonia

- Have you visited any Indian restaurants in Estonia?
  - Yes
  - No
- If yes, how would you rate your overall experience with Indian restaurants in Estonia?
  - Excellent
  - Good
  - Average
  - Poor
  - Haven't tried
- Which Indian restaurants have you visited in Estonia? (Select all that apply)
  - Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- What do you look for when choosing an Indian restaurant?
  - Authentic taste
  - Variety of menu options
  - Price/value for money
  - Ambiance/decor

- Customer service
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- What could be improved in Indian restaurants in Estonia?
  - More authentic flavors
  - Better vegetarian/vegan options
  - Service quality
  - Atmosphere
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Additional Feedback

- What would encourage you to explore Indian cuisine or hotels more in Estonia?
- Any suggestions or comments about Indian restaurants or hotels in Estonia?

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce the thesis and make the thesis public

I,

Shakeel Chauhan

1. grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the digital archives of the University of Tartu until the expiry of the term of copyright, my thesis **Indian and Asian Restaurants in Estonia: Authenticity and Hybridity** supervised by; Dr. Elo-Hanna Seljamaa and Dr. Margaret Lyngdoh

2. grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the thesis specified in point 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 4.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright;

3. am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in points 1 and 2;

4. confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Shakeel Chauhan

21/05/2025