

Migration, Transnational Flows, and Development in India

A Regional Perspective

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The relationship between migration and development is a key area in research and policymaking. The contributions of international migrants to their home countries in the form of remittances, investments, and philanthropic donations are widely regarded as an important development resource. This paper reviews the migration and development debate and the current state of knowledge about flows of migrant resources to India and argues that tracing transnational connections and flows at the regional level will provide a more nuanced understanding of their social and economic implications.

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Contemporary development discourses often represent migrants from developing countries as “agents of development” (Faist 2008) because of the substantial resources that they transmit back home through remittances, investments, and philanthropic donations. Accordingly, the relationship between migration and development has emerged as a key area of research, with numerous policy initiatives at the international and national levels directed at enhancing the connections between diasporic communities and their countries of origin.

In this paper we argue that to fully understand the connections between migration and development it is necessary to carefully unravel the complexities of various forms of transnational mobility and remittances. The diverse transactions that are usually homogenised into categories such as remittances or diaspora philanthropy are in reality multifaceted social processes that are embedded in, and inflected by, the specific histories, social structures and political-economic formations of the migrant sending regions. We argue further that the effects of migrant resource flows can be best analysed by tracing them as they flow through the transnational social fields that connect diasporic communities with their home regions.

We first briefly review the migration and development debate, summarise the current state of knowledge on the flow of migrant resources to India – what we call “reverse flows” – which include remittances, diaspora philanthropy, and investments as well as intangible resources such as knowledge, cultural orientations or political ideologies.¹ We then draw attention to the multifaceted, multidirectional and multifocal nature of these flows and to the interconnections among them, and argue that by reinserting migrant resources into their broader social context we can better understand their effects on the home regions. Finally, we outline a methodological framework for mapping and analysing patterns of mobility and reverse flows in India.

Migration and Development Debate

A substantial body of development research and policymaking today focuses on the potential benefits of international migration for developing countries, particularly on the resources that are sent by migrants to their families or communities at home. This new “development mantra” (Kapur 2004) views migration as an opportunity rather than a negative outcome of

poverty and underdevelopment, as migrants from the south working in the north augment their skills and resources and become conduits through which human and financial capital is reinvested in their countries of origin.

The current discussion on migration and development was initiated by the World Bank report on *Global Development Finance* (2003), which claimed that the inflow of financial resources from developed to developing countries in the form of migrant remittances and philanthropy – at \$90 billion a year globally – was nearly twice the total flow of official development assistance. Subsequently, international development agencies have repeatedly highlighted the significance of migrant remittances as a source of capital and investment for developing countries. Recent figures put the volume of international remittance transfers to developing countries at \$300 billion – an increase of about 270% in the past decade (Guha 2011a: 2). Diaspora philanthropy is also recognised as an important form of migrant transfers (Geithner et al 2004).

The current interest in migration and development has produced a large amount of literature detailing the types, volumes, channels, destinations, and impact of remittances and other kinds of resource transfers. Most of these studies aim to determine whether and how resources sent by migrants to their home countries contribute (or not) to development. However, this work suffers from several theoretical and methodological problems. First, it is practically impossible to assess comprehensively the impact of migration on development either by measuring the net losses and gains of migration or by modelling the macroeconomic effects of remittances (Guha 2011a, 2011b). The inadequacy of official data is compounded by the large proportion of remittances that flow through informal channels. Further, most studies remain straitjacketed by conventional notions of both migration and development and simplistic models of their interconnections (De Haas 2010). Second, migration research often views mobility as a one-way process that mechanically connects migrant sending and migrant receiving countries (Raghuram 2009), while studies of remittances too concentrate on unidirectional flows of resources. Moreover, remittance research is often carried out in isolation from migration studies, as if these two kinds of flows (of people and resources) were not interlinked processes.

Third, the migration and development literature often constructs migrants primarily as economic actors, focusing narrowly on financial transactions to the neglect of other dimensions such as intangible flows of knowledge, ideas, and know-how, i.e., “social remittances” (Levitt 1998). Similarly, much more attention has been paid to the economic effects of remittances than to their potential sociocultural, ideological and political reverberations (Levitt 2008). The dominant view of migration and remittances as economic processes with primarily economic outcomes fails to take into account the cultural meanings, political motivations, or social implications of resource transfers.

Finally, there is the problem of scale. Despite a growing recognition that transnational networks connect migrants

with their home regions or towns at various scales, the development literature has focused mainly on the relationship between nationally defined diasporas and their home countries, and on the macroeconomic effects of remittances – what has been called “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). On the other hand, we have a number of micro-level qualitative studies that examine how remittance flows connect particular villages or communities with migrant members. While this literature provides a useful corrective to the national-level bias, many of these studies in turn ignore the larger political-economic context that shapes patterns of migration and remittances. Few scholars have attempted to capture the multiple scales at which transnational mobilities and flows occur, particularly at the intermediate level of the region, or the interconnections between different levels and types of flows.

In short, to fully unravel the intricacies of the multiple potential connections between migration and development, we need to track transnational flows in all their complexity. Before discussing how this might be done, in the following section we provide a brief account of what we currently know about flows of migrant resources to India.

The Indian Scenario

Since the 1970s, the Indian government has formulated a range of policies and programmes to encourage Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)² to invest in India. After 2002, when the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora released its report (Government of India 2002), India’s engagement with Overseas Indians (OIs) broadened. OIs came to be viewed as an important source not only of foreign exchange and investment capital but also of knowledge, expertise and skills. While many Indian diasporic communities across the world have maintained connections with their home regions for a long time (such as by sending remittances to their families at home or donations to local temples or schools), the creation of institutional, legal and financial frameworks to facilitate their involvement with India has both stimulated and reshaped these connections. In addition to national-level policymaking, several state governments (such as Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab) and even district bodies have forged direct relationships with their own regional or state diasporas by setting up NRI cells to channel donations and investments, organising local “Pravasi Bharatiya Divas” (Non-Resident Indian Day) events and the like.

In this section we summarise the available information on three main types of material migrant transfers to India – (a) household remittances and NRI deposits (individual-level transfers); (b) collective remittances (diaspora philanthropy); and (c) direct investments – and on intangible resource flows. The discussion on migration and development in India has focused mainly on two issues – “brain drain” (Khadría 1999) and the macroeconomic impact of remittances (Nayyar 1994) – but the effects of migration and reverse flows in India are much more varied and complex than this literature suggests. However, as detailed below, available data sources do not

clearly map these various kinds of flows nor their ultimate destinations or uses.

Remittances

By 2001 India was already regarded as the largest recipient of overseas remittances in the developing world (World Bank 2003), and the country continues to hold first rank. Remittances rose dramatically from the 1990s due to several policy changes and incentive schemes (Kapur 2010: 112-13). World Bank figures put total remittance receipts in India at \$55 billion in 2010.³ There are two main channels of household-level remittances – direct transfers to families at home through official banking channels or other money transfer organisations, and local withdrawals from NRI accounts.⁴ According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, the largest proportion of remittance receipts in 2008-09 consisted of family-level remittance transfers at \$14,288 million, followed by local redemptions from NRI accounts (\$11,217 million), and “personal gifts and donations” at \$1,525 million. Total “private transfers” in that year amounted to \$46,903 million (Guha 2011a).

In addition to national-level data, we have several state-level studies such as the periodic Kerala Migration Surveys (Zachariah et al 2002). Kerala is the most studied state in India with regard to the impact of outmigration and remittances, yet existing analyses do not provide a clear picture even in this case. Several scholars suggest that remittances underpinned the “Kerala model” of development (Zachariah et al 2001a, 2001b), but others argue in contrast that remittances have created a consumer-driven economy marked by stark imbalances, decline in agricultural production, stagnant industrial development, and continuing high unemployment (Kannan 2005).

Moreover, micro- and macro-level studies of remittances often produce contradictory findings. The high level of remittances to states such as Kerala and Punjab appears to contribute to economic growth, increased consumption levels or enhanced social welfare at the macro-level (Banerjee et al 2002), yet micro-level studies suggest that remittances may also have negative effects, such as by sharpening social or economic divisions in the migrant sending communities (Taylor et al 2007) or by undermining local economic autonomy (Gardner 2008). Village studies confirm that migrants often display their newfound wealth by purchasing land or constructing opulent houses in their home villages – providing evidence for the pessimistic view that migrant resources are largely “wasted” on unproductive forms of consumption expenditure rather than being invested in “productive” activities (De Haas 2007: 16-17). Such uses of migrant remittances may also inflate local land prices or exacerbate polarisation of landownership (Gardner 1995). These conflicting conclusions suggest that many more local, regional, and state-level studies are required in order to understand the effects of migrant resource transfers.

Diaspora Philanthropy

Diaspora philanthropy is an increasingly significant modality of migrant resources flowing into India. This category encompasses a wide range of activities, from donations to

religious institutions, to support for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or charities or individual initiatives. According to one estimate, donations to religious organisations and charitable institutions from NRIs amounted to \$5,472 million between 1995 and 2002 (Kapur et al 2004: 183). However, there are no reliable figures on the extent or ultimate destinations and uses of NRI philanthropy, in part because a large proportion of such funds enter India through informal channels (Guha 2011a: 15).

NRI donations come through a range of routes – via remittances to family members who then donate to local temples or development projects, direct gifts by visiting migrants, or through registered trusts or foundations. Kapur et al (2004: 195) found that the two most important channels for Indian diaspora funds were informal family or personal networks and faith-based (religious) organisations, followed by international, NRI and national NGOs. In addition, there are numerous private initiatives promoted by wealthy NRIs who build schools or temples in their home villages – a form of philanthropy that usually escapes official statistics. Furthermore, family remittances may be used for philanthropic purposes by the recipients – a channel that is also not captured in existing data sources.

This review suggests that only through micro-level studies may we begin to get a better sense of the entire range of migrant resources that flow into different regions and locales in India, including the local perceptions and effects of these flows. For example, several studies indicate that migrant philanthropy in the home village may create divisions and conflicts between migrant and non-migrant households rather than enhancing overall welfare. The local people who are the supposed beneficiaries of migrant-funded development projects may perceive these activities cynically – as migrants’ investments in their own social status or as an attempt to make their stay more comfortable when they come for their annual visits (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 13-16).

Direct Investments

In addition to private savings schemes, various incentives to attract business investments from NRIs have been floated by the central and state governments, especially since 2005, for instance by setting up special economic zones (SEZs) exclusively for NRIs. However, RBI statistics do not reveal what proportion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India comes from NRIs or OIs, either as individual investors or through companies, nor do we have aggregate statistics on purchase of land, real estate, and other such investments by NRIs. Kapur (2010: 105) notes that NRI FDI flowing into India between 1991 and 2004 was just 7% of the total, at \$2.8 billion. Data from a survey of Indian origin households in the US suggest that the majority of NRI investments were “passive”, going into real estate (33%) or bank accounts (28%) rather than business or other investments (ibid: 93-94). This finding is significant because it confirms what is suggested by anecdotal information – that land (including agricultural land) and real estate are major destinations of NRI money flowing into India.

Social Remittances

Much attention has been paid to material resource transfers, but intangible flows emanating from the Indian diaspora, such as transfers of knowledge, ideas and know-how, professional and scientific collaborations, and dissemination of political or religious ideologies, arguably exert more influence on India's development trajectory. While the Government of India has been interested in tapping NRIs for their social and cultural capital in addition to their economic resources, many NRIs in turn are deeply engaged in political advocacy and social movements in India (Bose 2008). Religious transnationalism is an example of intangible flows (van der Veer 2002) – religious organisations are especially prominent destinations for NRI donations, with mixed and controversial results. NRI contributions to the construction of temples or to right-wing religious/cultural organisations reportedly have been instrumental in sharpening intercommunity conflicts in India (Rajagopal 1997). However, transnational connections forged by political or religious movements do not necessarily result in increased radicalisation, as is often assumed, but may have more complex outcomes such as a trend towards “moderation” or support for religious or social reforms (Ahmad 2005; Osella and Osella 2008).

NRI Connections with India

This selective review of literature on the south Asian region shows that remittances, investments, and philanthropy by Indians living abroad constitute a substantial (and highly uneven) inflow of financial resources to India, yet the quality of data on these cross-border flows is inadequate. What kinds of networks link different towns and regions with migrants abroad, what resources flow through them, and what are their key destinations and uses? What role do local actors play in attracting, directing, and utilising migrant remittances or philanthropy? How have state institutions, at different levels, responded to migrant activities and investments within India? To answer such questions we need a more nuanced approach to mapping and analysing transnational flows and their consequences for “development” in the recipient regions.

Nuancing Transnational Flows

In this section we argue that remittances, philanthropic donations, and other kinds of reverse flows are multifaceted, multi-directional, and multi-nodal, and so cannot be easily reduced to one-way, singular transactions or movements as they are usually represented in the development-oriented literature.

First, as noted above, much of the migration and development literature ignores crucial social, cultural, political, or ideological dimensions of migrant resource flows, analysing them in isolation from the larger context within which both mobility and resource transfers take place. Yet such flows are in reality multidimensional in character – they are not simply economic transactions but are deeply embedded in social networks and transmitted through a range of social mechanisms, such as kinship and caste networks, to diverse recipient sites. For example, non-economic (especially political) factors may

be more significant in decisions by NRIs to remit, invest or donate to India, rather than only financial considerations (Walton-Roberts 2004). Conversely, studies of transnational political or religious movements or other kinds of “social remittances” often treat them as entirely separate from economic flows, even though mobilising funds is usually a key activity. Transnational flows are not only interpellated by local, national and transnational socio-economic structures and processes, but may have profound (and often unintended) political and cultural consequences. For instance, funding for development activities is often accompanied by new models and practices of development or ideas of the “good society”, which may reshape existing development paradigms or programmes in the recipient country.

Second, what are treated as different types of transfers (family remittances, capital investment and donations) are often closely entangled with one another. In coastal Andhra, for instance, diaspora philanthropy is but one strand in a multiplicity of flows, including business investments that emanate from affluent Non-Resident Telugus (NRTs). For example, the mushrooming of super-speciality private hospitals in the region has been linked to NRT investments, even as NRT doctors are promoting charitable activities in the health sector.

Unravelling the intertwined paths and ultimate destinations of resources travelling through transnational networks is made all the more difficult because the channels and utilisation of migrant transfers may diverge. In central Gujarat, money deposited in NRI bank accounts (which would be counted in official statistics as investments or remittances) may be withdrawn by local relatives to donate to religious or charitable organisations. Rather than slotting such transactions into separate categories of “remittances” or “philanthropy”, it is more useful to try to retain these complexities in tracking transnational flows.

Third, neither migration nor remittances are simple uni-directional processes – exchange of resources between migrants and their families or communities at home are usually multi-directional, while mobility too is increasingly circular or multipolar. People, money, things and ideas move in various directions and along multiple paths as interconnected flows through more or less structured networks or institutional arrangements. For example, the migration process is often supported by the migrant's family, and remittances may be regarded as repayment of such debts (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 3). Yet the large investments that are made by potential migrants and their families in the migration process itself – in education, attaining certifications, visa fees, travel costs, and support for migrant children while they get established abroad – are often ignored. Moreover, for some migrants such investment ultimately does not pay off (Rajan et al 2011). Investment in higher education is a particularly crucial strategy that underwrites high-skilled circular mobility and illustrates the high level of investments that are made in migration. Student migration, in turn, has become a key channel of mobility from India, with mixed consequences for these first generation migrants. The growing “transnational educational regime”

may have negative implications for social development in the home regions, by widening local inequalities or reshaping the educational priorities and career choices of local youth (Harriss and Osella 2010: 141).

Fourth, transnational connections and exchanges may get reproduced (and also altered) across several generations. A case in point are the Patels of central Gujarat, who first migrated to East Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and from the early 1970s to the UK, US, and other western countries. Many of these migrants have maintained ties with their home villages and continue to send back various kinds of remittances and resources, but the nature of these ties and resource flows have changed over time. While most remittances from East Africa migrants were used for household consumption, to make improvements to the ancestral house, and as investments in agriculture through the boring of tube wells and purchase of land, the more recent flows are invested primarily in bank accounts and real estate (non-agricultural land and housing property) or for philanthropy, especially in the education and health sectors (Dekkers and Rutten 2011; Rutten and Patel 2002). Strategies of mobility unfold over time, which means that a longitudinal approach would better capture the multidirectional and multidimensional character of these flows.

The circulation of migrants themselves, who return to their homes periodically or permanently, is an important aspect of multidirectionality that may significantly impinge on social and cultural configurations in their home villages or towns (Ramji 2006). A growing number of highly educated NRIs are returning to India to work, start businesses, or to retire, bringing with them accumulated knowledge, capital and other resources as well as intangible resources such as political ideas or know-how. Returned NRIs, or “RNRIs”, who often come back to settle not in their native towns or villages but in India’s “hi-tech” cities such as Hyderabad or Bangalore, bring with them new aspirations, ideals, and ideologies that are conditioned by their experiences abroad (Chacko 2007). The earlier dominant one-way flow of highly skilled labour from developing to high-income countries is being replaced by more complex circular and multipolar movements of skills, capital, and technology between specialised regional economies. For example, wealthy Indian-origin information technology (IT) entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley have invested significantly in the IT sector in India (Upadhyaya 2004), while Indian IT professionals circulate through various sites in the global informational economy. Another example of multidirectionality is the children of NRIs coming back to India for schooling, who stay with grandparents or are enrolled in elite international boarding schools that promise to provide not only a good education but also a grounding in Indian culture. In other cases, grandparents move in the other direction, travelling to the UK or US to take care of grandchildren to enable both NRI parents to pursue their careers (Lamb 2002).

Finally, the forms, destinations and uses of transnational flows are shaped by the kinds of migrant and transnational organisations or networks through which they move. As Levitt

and Lamba-Nieves (2011) point out, what comes back is influenced by migrants’ prior experiences and the ideas and practices that they take with them. By treating different kinds of mobilities – of people and resources – to and from (and within) a region as disconnected and discrete processes, we curtail the possibility of producing more in-depth and fine-grained analyses of these flows.

Mapping Transnational Flows

Only by reinserting migrant resource flows back into the transnational social fields through which they travel (and of which they are constitutive) can we begin to understand the significance of reverse flows and their effects in the recipient regions and communities. In this section we review key concepts that have developed around the idea of transnationalism and discuss their theoretical potential. We also draw on anthropological literature on south Asia that provides additional insights into migration, transnational connections, and their consequences for migrants and their home regions.

The idea of transnationalism came into prominence in the early 1990s (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992) and caught the attention of many social science scholars, leading to the development of the interdisciplinary field of transnational studies. The concept has been refined and employed in various ways, such as in the concepts of transnational community, transnational social space, and transnational network. Faist defines “transnational social field” as “...combinations of social and symbolic ties and their contents, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organisations that cut across the borders of at least two national states” (2010: 1673). Transnationalism is not a territorially grounded concept but an “...optic or gaze that begins with a world without borders, empirically examines the boundaries and borders that emerge at particular historical moments, and explores their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes” (Levitt and Khagram 2007: 5). Although the maintenance of social ties between migrant groups and their home countries is a much older phenomenon, it is argued that transnational connections have only recently acquired the “critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field” (Portes et al 1999: 217). This literature also suggests that systemic or structural shifts are occurring in places that have significant patterns of outmigration, or that transnationalism may at least deepen or broaden ongoing processes of transformation in the home region (Vertovec 2004). The transnational framework has the advantage of taking into account both sides of these connections and flows (migrants and those at home), by mapping the networks and channels through which people and resources move.

The anthropological literature has contributed additional insights into how transnational social fields are formed and maintained. A number of studies point to the centrality of marriage practices in people’s migration strategies and the reproduction of transnational networks (Charsley and Shaw 2006). Similarly, migration and reverse flows often move through caste or kinship ties, altering or reinforcing them and

extending these relations across space (Velayutham and Wise 2005), and often creating transnational networks of caring and support (Gardner 2006). Geographical mobility should also be understood as part of interlinked strategies of social mobility, which may include transnational marriages, pursuit of foreign educational certifications, or visible acts of philanthropy. Such mobility strategies may have unintended consequences for local societies, as when remittance flows create inequalities between migrant and non-migrant households or introduce consumption-oriented lifestyles that others seek to emulate. An emergent “culture of migration” (Ali 2007) may foster new aspirations among village youth, contribute to the reinforcement or reconstitution of cultural, religious or community identities, or introduce new imaginaries of progress and modernity (Gardner and Osella 2003; Osella and Osella 2006).

From an anthropological perspective, transnational connections, like all social relationships, are created and sustained in part through the exchange of gifts, flows of commodities and other material transactions (Werbner 1990). By abstracting particular transactions (such as remittances) out of their social contexts, development-oriented studies often refuse to recognise the thick cultural substratum of various forms of reciprocity or the centrality of accumulation to mobility strategies. Remittances are never just individual transactions aimed at sustaining households but are motivated and structured by social relations of kinship, family, or caste, by cultural identities based on religion or language, or by political imaginaries of national or sub-national homelands. Flows of money, gifts, commodities, ideas, and people through transnational social fields are not just economic processes but are loaded with cultural meanings. Viewing specific resource flows in their social and cultural contexts provides a deeper understanding of their larger significance and local effects.

Drawing on these insights, in the final section we sketch out an analytical framework for tracking resource transfers from migrants to their home regions in order to better understand their consequences. The complex nature of transnational social spaces demands a more nuanced approach that not only captures their multidimensional nature but also the various scales at which transnational networks are formed – especially the regional scale.

Transnationalism at a Regional Scale

Although the idea of transnationalism has stimulated an outpouring of research and rethinking on international migration and its implications, this literature has tended to reproduce the problem of methodological nationalism. In India too, most studies of migration and development remain at the level of the country or state, glossing over significant regional variations in patterns of migration and in the volume, kinds, and destinations of remittances and other reverse flows. Transnational social fields are shaped by institutional actors, power dynamics and policies at, below, and above the level of the nation state – hence the study of transnational ties and flows must be multi-scalar in approach (Caglar 2004). Yet the

literature on transnationalism in India has largely ignored the intermediate level of the *region* – a socio-economic or cultural formation below the level of the nation state and also smaller than most Indian states, but usually larger than the district.

The region is not a readily definable geographical unit – it is usually not coterminous with a political entity, and may have a primarily agro-economic, cultural, linguistic or political identity but with inchoate or shifting boundaries. Yet across much of India, regions are recognised as salient socio-spatial categories, characterised by distinct histories, languages, or cultural configurations.⁵ Regions have their own dynamics that cannot be captured by micro-level studies and that are often glossed over in state- and national-level analyses. We suggest that the region is the most appropriate scale for mapping patterns of mobility and reverse flows, not only because of India’s great regional diversity but because transnational flows are shaped and inflected by the specific histories, social structures and political-economic formations of the migrant sending regions. Focusing on the region will therefore produce a more grounded understanding of the interconnections between the diverse places, people, and scales that constitute the transnational social fields through which remittances, diaspora philanthropy, and NRI investments move. In addition, a series of regional-level studies will allow for comparison of reverse flows across regions, perhaps revealing significant correspondences between types of migration or diasporic networks and the kinds of resources that come back.

The proposed methodology would also map the institutional structures, networks, and key nodal points through which resources move or which direct, facilitate, and motivate these flows. Processes of transnationalisation may transform social institutions (for example, of citizenship, education, or kinship), and these institutional changes, in turn, influence processes of transnationalisation (Faist et al 2010: 8-10). With the strengthening of transnational ties, older institutions may acquire new meanings or functions, or new institutions may emerge at various levels – local or regional (such as schools or welfare organisations funded by migrants), national (changes in citizenship rules), and transnational (migrant associations). A growing literature is documenting the diverse associations, voluntary organisations and social networks that channel collective migrant resources, such as “home town associations” (Caglar 2006). Thus, one research strategy for studying the regional effects of cross-border flows is to map the institutional structures through which they move, and the ways in which institutions have been transformed by such flows.

To illustrate the usefulness of a “transnational optic” with a focus on the region and mediating structures and connections, we take the example of diaspora philanthropy. A large number of diasporic and transnational organisations and individual NRIs are engaged in philanthropic activities in India, including formally constituted associations as well as informal networks. Such organisations or networks may be very broad-based or narrow in their membership, but most are constructed on the basis of regional, linguistic, religious, or caste

identities (Rutten 2008), and in most cases their activities are directed to their home towns or regions. Many diasporic organisations mobilise donations to support development projects in areas such as education, health and rural development, while local NGOs and charitable foundations in turn may solicit NRI donations to support their activities. NRI philanthropic activities may emanate from existing organisations or create new ones; link new institutional structures to existing local organisations in India; or promote the establishment of new kinds of NGOs or social movements in the target areas. The social composition of such associations presumably influences the kinds of developmental or social welfare initiatives that they sponsor in India. However, we have few case studies of the activities of NRI-sponsored NGOs or development initiatives. Below we provide a brief comparative sketch of three regional diasporas and their philanthropic activities – Patels from central Gujarat, migrants from the Doaba region of Punjab, and Telugu NRIs from coastal Andhra in the us.

Patels from central Gujarat constitute a large and powerful diaspora with a long tradition of supporting developmental schemes in their home villages, particularly for education and health. The Gujarat state government has actively courted NRI investments through concessional schemes and events such as the biannual Vibrant Gujarat summit. Yet it appears that the majority of donations in this region are not channelled through state institutions or formal organisations but primarily through informal village, caste or religious organisations or networks. Many Patel NRIs provide donations directly when they visit their native villages or transmit them through their resident relatives. This avoidance of formal channels may be due in part to their distrust of government bureaucracy (Rutten and Patel 2007) or to the ideological role of Hindutva and religious sentiments that influence many overseas Patels to donate to temples and religious organisations (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 16-18). A similar pattern is seen in the Doaba region of Punjab, with its long history of transnationalisation and close involvement of diasporic groups with their home regions (Tatla and Dusenbery 2010). Philanthropic remittances have grown in importance over the last two decades, but while earlier generations of migrants often sent donations to establish large memorial gates in their home villages and towns in memory of their ancestors, currently such resources are directed more to supporting development activities or gurudwaras (Rajan and Varghese 2010: 104).

The pattern of diaspora philanthropy in coastal Andhra is quite different from that seen in central Gujarat or the Doaba. us-based NRTs frequently raise money and organise developmental activities in the home region, especially for rural areas, and these resources are usually channelled through registered trusts or public-private schemes. The Andhra Pradesh state government has set up a state-level department of NRI affairs, and there are NRI cells at the district level as well which channel resources donated by NRTs. Much of the philanthropic activity in the region is spearheaded by strong diasporic associations based in the us, such as the Foundation of the Telugu Association of North America (TANA) and the American Telugu

Association (ATA).⁶ A number of foundations and trusts headed by NRIs or with NRI funding are working in coastal Andhra, especially in the health and education sectors (Heerink 2011). Highly educated NRTs tend to support initiatives linked to their professions, such as setting up private medical or engineering colleges (which may be for-profit as well as charitable institutions), while religious donations appear to be less significant in Andhra compared to the Doaba region of Punjab or central Gujarat.

These examples illustrate the variability of the phenomena that are usually lumped together in a single category of “diaspora philanthropy”. Even within a single region we find a complex congeries of transnational flows, characterised by different sources, channels, and destinations, which can only loosely be grouped together as similar phenomena. In order to explain these patterns and variations, we need to track such flows at the regional level and then compare spatial and scalar differences in their nature and destinations. We also need to contextualise them within transnational social fields that have been shaped by the histories and social formations of the home regions. For example, the distinct migration patterns of the dominant landowning communities of coastal Andhra and central Gujarat, which are linked to the agrarian structures and social histories of these regions, may explain their divergent modes of transnational giving and engagement with the home villages. The landowning castes of Andhra transnationalised themselves through higher education, especially in engineering and medicine, followed by migration to North America, creating a regional diaspora of highly educated, professional NRTs. This regional diaspora usually supports health, education, or rural development initiatives and tends to channel funds through formal channels such as NGOs, government schemes or registered trusts. In contrast, Patel migrants have established themselves abroad – in Africa, the UK, and the us – mainly as small businessmen and traders. For them, maintaining strong links of caste and kinship with their native villages through direct donations can be seen as a key strategy of both social mobility and security. The socio-economic characteristics and historical formation of these regional diaspora thus help to explain these divergent patterns of giving.

Conclusions

Flows of migrant resources, both tangible and intangible, to developing countries are believed to influence processes of economic and social development. Such resources enter the home villages and towns of migrants through transnational social fields, with diverse implications for local economies, social structures, politics, and cultural orientations. The nature and effects of reverse flows are highly variable and complex and depend on a range of factors, including the historical and social specificities of the migrant sending regions; the types and pattern of mobility from the region; and the institutional structures that shape and direct such flows. In order to go beyond current discussions on remittances, diaspora philanthropy and migrant investments, an ethnographically

thicker and theoretically more sophisticated account of transnational connections and flows is needed, in particular by paying more attention to the historical and sociological specificities of different regions and their transnational social fields. We suggest that the regional scale is best suited for understanding and contextualising reverse flows to India, while keeping in view the multi-scalar nature of transnational social spaces. Our proposed methodological approach to this

research problem is centred on mapping regional transnational social fields and the organisational structures and networks that facilitate and direct reverse flows. This approach will allow us to better delineate and understand the implications of mobilities and transnational flows and to compare these processes across regions, which in turn will generate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the migration and development nexus in India.

NOTES

- We use the term “reverse flows” to refer to the entire gamut of remittances, investments, and other resources – tangible and intangible – that are sent by migrants or diasporic communities to their families or communities in India – also including return flows of migrants themselves. However, we are aware that the term has a different meaning in macroeconomics, referring to remittances that are used not for consumption or investment but for debt amortisation, reserve accumulation, or capital flight (Das and Serieux 2010). Thanks to Jafar K for pointing this out.
- In this paper the term “NRI” (Non-Resident Indian) is used generically and interchangeably with the currently official term “Overseas Indians” (OI), in consonance with its popular usage. OI in government parlance is a very broad category encompassing many types and generations of people of Indian origin around the world. NRIs is an order category with linked financial policies, which includes Indian citizens residing abroad as well as certain categories of non-citizens of Indian origin. The Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards are like long-term visas, available only to non-citizens (Indian origin people who have taken up foreign citizenship).
- World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011, viewed on 8 October 2011 (<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/External/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21352016~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html>).
- Several of the government’s NRI savings schemes provide limited withdrawal rights to family members.
- For example, in Andhra Pradesh the three regions of coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema do not (yet) have official political boundaries, but they are recognised as distinct socio-economic and cultural formations flowing from their diverse histories. In this paper we do not have space expand on the question of the region, except to note that it is not merely a spatial or scalar concept. Conceptual and methodological issues of region and scale will be clarified in a forthcoming paper.
- TANA website, viewed on 8 December 2011 (<http://www.tana.org/?docid=29>); ATA website, viewed on 8 December 2011 (http://www.ataworld.org/index.cfm?select=projects&project_type=charitable%20projects).

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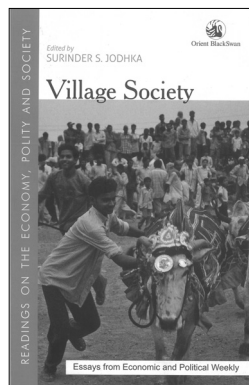
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