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Caste, kinship and the realisation of ‘American Dream’: high-skilled Telugu migrants in the U.S.A.

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ABSTRACT

Literature on the Indian diaspora domiciled in the U.S.A. largely portrays the group as educated, highly skilled migrants in pursuit of their *American Dream*, without critically engaging with the regionally particularised migration trajectories that predispose only certain groups to become skilled migrants from the global South to the North. Migration studies bracket skilled migrants as those who make rational choices and choose formal routes to migrate whereas unskilled migrants often rely on informal channels of kinship or ethnicity to migrate. Unsettling this proposition, in this article, based on an ethnographic study of the high-skilled Telugu professionals in the U.S.A. and their families living in Coastal Andhra, India, I show how aspirational and topographical migration pathways from Coastal Andhra to the U.S.A. are created and sustained through networks of kinship, caste and endogamous transnational marriage alliances. These high-skilled migrants (doctors, engineers and scientists) from the dominant castes have successfully manoeuvred spatial mobility and social upward mobility by utilising ‘caste capital’ within a transnational social field. Moreover, decades of migration from the dominant castes have shaped a caste-inflected transnational habitus among its members who see migration of their youth to the U.S.A. as desirable, and at times, also inevitable.

KEYWORDS

High-skilled migrants; Coastal Andhra; Telugu; American Dream; caste capital; transnational habitus

Introduction: living the ‘American dream’

‘I am living my American dream ... I have worked hard for it’. (Narendra P¹, IT professional and Manager in a renowned IT firm, U.S.A.)

Narendra hails from Poranki, a small village near the town of Vijayawada in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. A man in his early 40s,² living with his wife and 2 children in Fairfax, Virginia, since 1996, Narendra takes unabashed pride in this transnational journey from Poranki to Fairfax. To him, his success is an outcome of the hard work of his parents and himself. His parents made sure he got a good education from Indian Institute of Technology, Madras,³ and he too never let them down, by ‘studying well’ and

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‘settling down’⁴ well in life as an IT software professional. However, he was not very happy with being in India, where the scope for personal growth, according to him, is ‘limited’. The U.S.A. was the destination of choice for him and he was lucky to be part of those early Telugu⁵ migrants who migrated there following the information technology or IT boom since the late 1980s.

While it was his ‘hard work’ that helped him migrate to the U.S.A., on further probing it emerged that there were multiple layers at work that drove him to pursue his ‘American Dream’. He first dreamt of migrating to the U.S.A., inspired by the stories of his ‘doctor uncle’ who was already there since the early 1970s. Narendra grew up hearing stories of ‘America’ as a ‘promised land’ where everything was ‘far better’ than in India. These stories were only one of the many triggers that created a desire in him to migrate. Coastal Andhra region⁶ where Narendra hails from, had already seen a steady flow of migrants from among the dominant agrarian castes⁷ – Kammas, Vellamas, Reddys and Rajus – to the U.S.A. as doctors and engineers. By the time he finished his graduation in 1992, many of his college batch mates had ‘made it’ to the U.S.A. Narendra did not want to be ‘left out’. His chance finally came in 1996 when he received a marriage proposal from a Telugu girl from Vijayawada (who was also his distant relative) living in the U.S.A. – a proposal which he immediately accepted. His future wife had migrated as an IT student to New Jersey and stayed on to work there. Narendra and his wife are both Kammas, the most powerful of the dominant castes in Coastal Andhra.

Narendra leads a transnational life. On the one hand he is entrenched within the ‘high-quality’ American lifestyle with a job, house, cars, investments in the stock market and children going to school in the U.S.A. On the other, he is also rooted in the ‘Telugu culture’ making sure his family including his children speak Telugu, eat Andhra food and watch Telugu films. He also keenly follows Telugu news as he is passionate about Telugu politics. His closest friends are fellow Telugus from the Coastal Andhra region – many of them belonging to the same Kamma caste as himself. Moreover with frequent visits to Andhra Pradesh and his parents regularly visiting him in the U.S.A., Narendra successfully straddles two lifeworlds simultaneously, maintaining dual transnational ties (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995). Such social transnational connections are vital for migrants like Narendra, as it is through them transnational linkages between the U.S.A. and Coastal Andhra are produced and maintained.

I begin this article with Narendra’s story as it captures vignettes from his life, which when pieced together tell us a story of aspiration for social and spatial mobility that link home and abroad through a transnational habitus (Guarnizo 1997, 311). This habitus,⁸ as explained later on in the article, incorporates the social position of the migrant and the context in which his or her migration occurs. As Narendra’s case encapsulates, his journey to the U.S.A. as a ‘high-skilled migrant’ is not merely about a rational choice to migrate for better economic opportunities. His decision is tempered by a long held desire to migrate – a desire borne out of a transnational habitus moulded in a far flung village like Poranki where caste location and kinship play an important role in shaping such transnational desires.

While role of kinship in transnational mobility has been established through research (Levitt 2001; Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007), migration studies bracket high-skilled migrants as those who make rational economic choices (Ho 2011) and choose formal routes to migrate whereas unskilled migrants often rely on informal channels of kinship

or ethnicity to migrate (Vertovec 2002, 3). Unsettling this proposition, in this article based on a 15-month multi-sited ethnographic study of the high-skilled Telugu professionals in the U.S.A. and their families living in Coastal Andhra, India, I argue that aspirational and topographical migration pathways from Coastal Andhra to the U.S.A. are created and sustained through interrelated networks of kinship and caste. Such networks become the basis of 'caste capital', which works in ways that predisposes some groups over others to achieve spatial and social mobility, thereby reproducing caste privileges on a transnational scale.

Caste, kinship and creation of migration pathways

Research on Indian migrants suggest that those who have moved out of independent India and settled in the West have increasingly been highly skilled professionals such as doctors, engineers and scientists (Khadria 1999; Kapur 2010). Armed with 'knowledge capital', these groups utilise their alumni networks for various purposes (Lessinger 2003), including getting a job. However, professional networks alone do not lead to more migration as De Haas (2010) points out, and while economic opportunities pave the way for migration, it does not explain why in Coastal Andhra, high-skilled migration occurs in 'clustered' geographical patterns. To understand this pattern, what needs to be explored are the interlinkages between high-skilled migration, the gendered aspect of this category of migrants, their social networks and different forms of capital at their disposal (Bailey and Mulder 2017, 6) that work together to create chain migration from the region. De Haas' hypothesis is that low-skilled migrants often depend on social capital to migrate abroad unlike the relatively wealthy, high-skilled migrants (De Haas 2010, 1604). This echoes with Portes' (1997) analysis that labour migrants or political exiles who intend to return maintain relations with their country of origin. The assumption that exists in this literature is that highly skilled migrants need not rely on social capital as their knowledge network (in itself, it may be referred to as *knowledge capital*) helps in their mobility trajectory (Vertovec 2002, 3). This proposition does not hold true if we examine how high-skilled Telugu migrants from Coastal Andhra utilise networks outside the scope of formal or professional networks to chain migrate to countries like the U.S.A.

Scholars began looking at chain migration since the early 1960s to understand why certain cities in the U.S.A. had clusters of migrants from particular Italian towns by pointing out how newer migrants benefit from 'primary social relationships with previous migrants' (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964, 82). Choldin (1973) surmised that kinship networks are 'considerably involved' in migration – creating chain migration through material aid, such as financial assistance, and non-material aid, such as providing information to potential migrants among kinship groups. Migration, therefore, did not break or weaken kinship relations. Taking the study of kinship further, scholars started examining the 'social capital' migrants have that help them migrate. Massey et al. (1998) found a link between social capital and migrant networks, where the capital derived through the location-based networks of the migrants is used to convert social capital into other forms of capital.

If we add a transnational social field approach (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), we can explore the making and unmaking of migrant networks for all categories of migrants (including skilled and unskilled ones), based on their social and other forms of capital

(Bourdieu 1986). Scholars studying transnationalism theorised the creation of transnational social fields, linking ‘migrants with their families’ place of origin’ and incorporating the ‘participants in the day to day activities of social reproduction in these various locations’ (Fouon and Schiller 2001, 544). For these migrants who live within a transnational social field, ‘incremental changes’ over time lead to the emergence of ‘bifocality of outlooks’ that underpins migrant lives ‘of being here and there simultaneously’ (Vertovec 2004, 977). Bifocality and a social field approach explain how migrants and migrant communities utilise various forms of capital at their disposal in the migration process. As the article will show, kinship, including endogamous marriage practices and ‘caste capital’, become vital nodes that link migrants’ places of origin and destination and create and sustain a transnational social field within which high-skilled migration pathways are etched between Coastal Andhra and the U.S.A. (Werbner 1999).

There exists a nuanced literature on the Indian or South Asian diaspora settled particularly in the U.S.A. and the U.K. focussing on religious, cultural or economic complexities within the group (Bhatt and Mukta 2000; Parekh, Singh, and Vertovec 2003). Yet, there is a paucity of literature that looks at the ‘other side’, interrogating the processes that render certain groups more mobile than others, or exploring how local social formations (including the role of caste and kinship) affect migration trajectories. Some exceptions do exist – like the works of Osella and Osella (2000) and Gallo (2006) on Kerala, Ballard (1990) and Taylor, Singh, and Booth (2007) on Punjabi migrants, Gardner’s (2008) work on Bangladeshi migrants. This literature explores how caste, status, hierarchy and kinship inflect transnational migration. One of the ways in which caste and kinship operate on a transnational plane is through marriages. Marriages in South Asia adhere to rules based on caste endogamy or marriage within one’s own caste. Migrants often carry forward these affinal rules to places of migrant settlement (Shaw 2001; Charsley 2006; Charsley and Shaw 2006). Transnational marriages are often performed within castes or *biradaris* not only to maintain ritual purity, but for other functions as well, including the consolidation of migrants’ socio-economic position in countries of origin, or as an immigration strategy; yet, it is also a means to show the diaspora’s commitment to their kinsmen (cf. Shaw 2001). However, these studies that look at the role of kinship and caste often focus on migrants who cannot be termed as high-skilled workers, thereby indicating that kinship, caste and ethnic networks play a role in the migration of the unskilled or semi-skilled workforce. The story of Narendra shows that skilled migrants also make use of kinship- and caste-based networks to migrate to the U.S.A. Moreover, his marriage performs a similar function to that of unskilled migrants – on the one hand it helped him achieve the coveted spatial and upward social mobility, and, on the other, his endogamous marriage could also be seen as his commitment towards his kinsmen.

As I argue in this article, high-skilled workers also employ caste, kin and ethnic networks along with what I call ‘caste capital’, strategically pairing these informal means with more formal means like professional networks and placement consultancies to migrate to the U.S.A. These forms of migrant practices inscribe aspirational and topographical transnational pathways connecting Coastal Andhra to the U.S.A. Moreover, such pathways further shape a transnational habitus that enables future migrants from the same caste groups to negotiate transnational spaces and become successful high-skilled migrants in the future.

Utilising caste capital for transnational migration

It's (migrating to the USA) a craze no? (Sambasiva Rao, businessman, Guntur)

There are roughly 2.04 million Indian Americans in the U.S.A. and the Telugus are one of the five biggest linguistic groups within the Indian diaspora domiciled there.⁹ 'America' has emerged as the most sought after destination among the Telugu migrants from Coastal Andhra region, which has been sending significant number of migrants to the U.S.A. since the 1960s. While during my research, I did come across families whose members migrated to the U.S.A. as early as the 1950s for higher studies; with the coming of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the background of Indians migrating to the United States changed 'fundamentally' (Bhatia 2007, 14) and high-skilled migrants started moving to the U.S.A. with the easing of visa restrictions. In Coastal Andhra, the Act paved the way for the migration of high-skilled workers – doctors, engineers, scientists, pharmacists, etc. – who largely belonged to 'dominant' castes. Kammas are one such dominant caste group in Coastal Andhra who have been at the forefront of migration to the U.S.A.

Understanding how a caste primarily into farming came to be at the forefront to cater to the demand of skilled migrants in the U.S. necessitates that we historicise the socio-political ascendance of this caste over the past few decades. Through the work of Upadhyya (1988a, 1988b) and others (Baker and Washbrook 1975), we can briefly sketch a history of the region and see how its specific political economy created possibilities for some groups to accumulate surplus capital from farming, and diversify this income by investing it in agro-based businesses or other non-agricultural occupations, while also utilising some of this capital for the higher education of their children. Being at the forefront of missionary activities, Guntur and Krishna districts had seen remarkable missionary investments in higher education (Frykenberg 2008). Institutes such as the Andhra Christian College, Women's College and Guntur Medical College had made Guntur district a hub of higher education in the early and mid-1900s. Apart from these public institutes of higher education, Coastal Andhra was one of the first regions in India where private engineering and medical colleges began to flourish in the 1970s, often funded by wealthy members of the dominant castes (cf. Kamat, Mir, and Mathew 2004) like the Kammas. Seats in these colleges were coveted by students, and technically anyone who could pay the high fees commanded by these colleges could get admission but, in reality, preference would be given to students belonging to the same caste as the college management. These historical factors made Kammas the wealthiest agrarian community in Coastal Andhra and played an important role in making the group accrue benefits of both internal and international mobility strategies – a point I have discussed in detail in another paper (Roohi, n.d.).

The desire among dominant castes' youths from Coastal Andhra to migrate to the U.S.A. is not only fuelled because of these historical developments however. There are also overlapping factors, which create and sustain such desires. At a more mundane level are economic calculations that U.S.A. provides very high earning opportunities – almost six to eight times more than what one earns in India. Above it are placed reasons related to the 'high living standards' one can attain in the U.S.A. Added to this is a 'clean political culture' – as one migrant parent who has been to the U.S.A. 15 times said, 'you see real democracy in the country. Its clean, you don't have to pay

bribe!' and as another doctor had confided to me, 'we are looked up with respect, there is no discrimination there against us, they only discriminate against the blacks'. But above all, the aspiring Telugu migrants from the region desire to go to the U.S.A. not only due to higher conversion rates of the U.S. dollar to Indian rupees, but because in the local imagination, stories of a successful neighbour, or relative or friend often from one's own caste fuel ambitions that make the U.S.A. a dream destination. Some high-skilled migrants or students do move to countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore or other European countries, but often with the aim of ultimately migrating to the U.S.A. (Biao 2007). Putting the hierarchy of migrant destinations in perspective, one Canadian Telugu businessman doing real estate business there told me in December 2014 'America and Canada are not the same, we (referring to Canadian Telugus) are looked down upon by the Americans, no matter how much money we have'. 'America' thus has a valourised image in the Telugu imagination.

Sambasiva Rao quoted above was 32 years old when I interviewed him in early 2012. The above quote was his answer to my question on why people migrate to the U.S.A. in such overwhelming numbers from the Guntur–Krishna districts of Coastal Andhra. Rao was one of the few youth who had stayed back in Guntur, 'a town of migrants', to take care of his father's crop storage facilities in the outskirts of the town. Sambasiva Rao, like Narendra, is a Kamma by caste and like many young men from his town, he also nurtured the ambition but his poor academic grades became a hindrance. He barely managed to pass the 12th grade or post-secondary public exam, and having failed to show the potential to migrate abroad, the responsibility of managing his father's business fell on him. His younger brother held more promise. Being the 'studious' one, he was better suited to migrate as a skilled professional to the U.S.A. After completing his engineering degree and with a brief work experience in India, Rao's brother succeeded in migrating to the U.S.A. and got a contract job with an IT firm in Los Angeles. Unlike Narendra, Sambasiva Rao's brother did not graduate from a top league engineering college, but his transnational job prospects did not decrease because of this. Rather, with strong caste-based connections, he made sure that he succeeded in giving shape to his 'craze to go to the USA'. Through a Hyderabad¹⁰-based consultancy firm 'run by a friend's friend' from the same caste, he managed to secure a contractual IT job in the U.S.A. after paying a substantial fee. He migrated to the prospect of a 'well-settled life' for himself and augmented social standing for his family.

Being an 'NRI¹¹ parent' (or parents of NRI children living abroad) is a matter of pride for the Kamma parents who stay in towns like Guntur and Vijayawada in Coastal Andhra. Conversely, it is a matter of 'shame' and a reflection of failure on the part of these parents to not be able to send their children to the U.S.A. or some other developed countries or even big cities in India because it is the parents who pull resources together to give their children a good professional education. The consultancy fee paid by Sambasiva Rao's brother was very high, running into a million Indian rupees, but the family arranged for the money and made sure that one son would migrate to the U.S.A. and help the family earn respectability in the Guntur circles where migrating to 'America' is seen as a measure of a family's social standing within the Kamma community.

Migration to the U.S.A. from the region can be roughly divided into three different waves between the 1960s and now. The first-wave migrants who went to the U.S.A. in the 1960s and the 1970s in substantial numbers were doctors or scientists. The second

wave largely comprised software engineers who moved out since the late 1980s and the 1990s. In the third wave, students migrated to the U.S.A., often to do Master of Science or M.S. in computer science. Sustained migration from the region in different waves has produced a culture of migration (Connell 2008), whereby members of the dominant castes consider transnational migration of their youth not as a rupture but a desirable extension of their lifeworld on a transnational plane.

Kamma families in the region send or aspire to send their wards to the U.S.A. to augment their family's social and financial capital. While most of these knowledge workers (Khadria 1999) migrating abroad are from a similar caste background, often there are broader class differences between the first-wave migrants and the rest. Many of those who migrated in the first phase were from families that are more affluent and were able to take the risks that migration entailed in the early days. Since families were larger then, sometimes, one or two sons were made to stay back to look after farming and the family invested in the 'brilliant' son's, or, in very few cases, daughter's higher education and migration cost, sometimes by putting land as a collateral. While scientists migrated after securing a Ph.D. position in U.S. universities, for the doctors, the route to the U.S.A. in the initial phase was circuitous, with many first landing in Iraq, Iran or Malaysia, and then migrating to the U.S.A. after clearing the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) exams. Now, the latest stopovers for aspiring doctors who cannot directly go to the U.S.A. are the Caribbean countries – yet, the aspiration still remains the same – to reach 'America'. In the absence of the World Wide Web in the 1960s and the 1970s, a lot of movement to the U.S.A. from this generation got activated through networks of information shared within the community about where residencies or vacancies were available, how one could go ahead with paper work and so on. It is not uncommon to hear that when the first-wave migrants flew to the U.S.A., there were others from the community who were in the same aircraft.

Following the IT boom, the second wave of migration began, with many Indian software engineers hailing from Coastal Andhra reaching the U.S.A. and other destinations as contract IT workers in the earlier days. Though IT workers had started moving to the U.S.A. from the late 1980s onwards, by the turn of the millennium, the movement of these engineers intensified, making Telugu migrants one of the sizable linguistic group in the U.S.A. Many of these migrants went to the U.S.A. through bodysshops (Biao 2007) or on H-1B visas¹² where IT firms provided the visa for high-skilled workers on a contractual basis. Second-wave migrants usually already had a family member, a relative, a friend or someone from the village living in the U.S.A. Unlike the earlier migrants, this generation of migrants were not always from well to do families. Often, the second-wave migrants were children of small-time farmers or government job-holders (many of them, teachers in primary schools) with smaller land holdings.

Since the 2000s and with the IT recruitments from India hitting a plateau, Telugu parents from Andhra started investing in their child's higher education like an M.S. degree in computer science from a U.S. college or university that would enable them to migrate to the U.S.A. as students after which they opt for Optional Practical Training or OTP. OTP is granted for up to a period of 12 months after completion or near completion of the studies during which students look for jobs and do part-time work in the U.S.A. During my fieldwork in the U.S.A. between May and July 2012, I talked to students of other castes from Andhra Pradesh who told me that Kamma students with strong caste

networks in the U.S.A. found it easier to get a job in small IT firms run by Kammass or get hired in software companies where the recruitment managers are Kammass. With the second and third wave of Telugu migrants from Coastal Andhra reaching American shores in substantial numbers, Telugu migrants in the U.S.A. have reached a critical mass, enabling a community life where their 'culture is not compromised', as one of my informant explained. Many of the second- and third-wave migrants already have relatives in the U.S.A. who had migrated earlier. These relatives may not have directly helped newer migrants in getting visas or jobs but they do provide information, advice and often material help until the new migrants 'settle down'. Thus, for many Kamma families of Guntur, chain migration of skilled workers to the U.S.A. has been fostered through caste and kinship networks.

Not everyone who went to the U.S.A. had a kin living there. In the absence of kinship ties in the U.S.A., some Coastal Andhra migrants benefitted not only from the dominant caste status that heralded the community to become knowledge workers, but by utilising caste capital and caste-based networks in getting easy access to international education or a job placement among other things. In Hyderabad city in the neighbouring state of Telangana and other Coastal Andhra towns, education consultancies or IT training and recruitment consultancies (many of them now in the U.S.A.) are mostly headed by the dominant castes. Village-based ties or kinship connections provide a jobseeker a better chance in searching for opportunities in the U.S.A. through these consultancies. For instance, in Guntur, aspiring jobseekers like Sambasiva Rao's brother approach a consultancy run by the members of their own caste, for a range of services including getting advanced training, an IT job, a fake work certificate or even jobs abroad. Moreover, caste and kinship connections also come into play when new migrants seek help from older migrants who are either from the new migrant's extended family or village or neighbourhood in Coastal Andhra now living in the U.S.A. These relatives, friends or co-villagers not only provide information and advice, but often are morally obliged to give more material help to the new migrants until they 'settle down'.

As these different migration trajectories of the three waves and their linkages to caste-inflected intra-generational networks illustrate, it is the functioning of 'caste capital' that creates migration aspirations and pathways among Kamma youths who see migration to the U.S.A., even while living in a small town like Guntur as a logical extension of their life-world. 'Caste-capital' (Deshpande 2013) plays a vital role in nourishing and sustaining these networks. Caste capital refers to the (largely invisible) symbolic, cultural or social capital that an actor may possess by virtue of upper or dominant caste affiliation, capital that accords advantages not enjoyed by people from other castes. In the case of transnational Kammass, caste capital allows for the strategic pairing of the global with the local (Kearney 1995) that facilitates the accumulation of symbolic capital (the NRI status and the respect that comes along with it) and social capital (strong caste-based social networks that yield tangible or intangible benefits in the migration process). The American dream nurtured in rural or semi-rural environments of Coastal Andhra is an attribute of what I call a malleable caste capital, in so far as it responds to changing times to become better suited to respond to these changes. Kamma families inherit social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) by virtue of their dominant caste status and strategic investment of agricultural surplus in higher education (Upadhyaya 1997), a process that has allowed them to respond to the global demand for skilled workforce

from the 1960s onward. These processes have further placed the caste group at an advantageous position to accumulate and enhance their existing social, symbolic or economic capital because of successful transnational migration that has continued in waves since then. These interrelated processes of capital accumulation have enabled youth of only certain castes to be 'migration ready' by careful deployment of caste-based networks and capital in either getting a degree, landing a job or getting married in a transnational setting. Marriages in such transnational set-ups become an important mechanism through which transnational migration among high-skilled workers is sustained over time.

Sambandham as gendered migration prospect

As mentioned earlier, America is a dream destination for Telugus and even when they are already living and working in a western country, the U.S.A. remains the ultimate migration destination. One practical reason why many preferred to migrate to the U.S.A., especially since the mid-1960s, was the relative ease of bringing entire families to the U.S.A. through the sponsorship scheme (Borjas and Bronars 1991). Among the migrants of the earlier wave, especially within families that did not have much economic assets and liabilities, a migrant sibling would help her other left-behind siblings to come to the U.S.A. through this family sponsorship scheme. Many families who migrated in the 1960s or the 1970s had the same story to narrate, pointing out how one sibling would migrate first, then the other siblings would be sponsored for their visas to come to the U.S.A. Kinship relations either through blood or marriage became a means to sustain transnational migration. While the rules became stringent over the years, it was relatively still easier to bring spouses on a dependent visa to the U.S.A. throughout the three waves. This route of transnational migration continued even after the tightening of immigration rules, when the second wave of migrants were only allowed to bring their spouses with them, especially since many of them were on H-1B or student visas.

Marriage as a high-skilled migration pathway linking the U.S.A. to Coastal Andhra, as in other regions of the world, is also gendered and unequal (Bailey and Mulder 2017), as the Coastal Andhra region overwhelmingly sends male migrants as knowledge workers to the U.S.A. The case of Narendra is more of an exception than a regular feature in the region. After working for a few years in the U.S.A., male professionals often search for marriage alliances in their home region and bring their wives to the U.S.A. on dependent visas. Through marriages, a hitherto non-migrant household (often a woman's family) can thus have a migrant member in their family. Since the earlier wave of migrants often had more than one sibling living in the U.S.A., multiple families within the caste group became migrant households through endogamous marriage practices. With many more Telugus from the region migrating in the second and third waves, in the 1990s and the 2000s many young women anticipated a transnational *sambandham* or marriage alliance for themselves – a trend that continues till date. However, over the last few years a gradual change has occurred, with young women from landowning castes in Coastal Andhra beginning to migrate on student visas in noticeable numbers. Often, several girls form a group and apply to the same colleges, and then migrate together. These girls belong to either the same colleges or the same villages or towns, or belong to the same caste. This migration pattern is similar to that of young men who would move to the U.S.A. on student visas during the 1990s and the 2000s. Nevertheless, because of very high costs

associated with it, young girls from dominant caste groups with professional degrees who cannot afford to go for Master's degrees in the U.S.A. still nurture dreams of endogamous transnational marriage alliances to fulfil their American dream. In their estimation, migration to the U.S.A. not only promises better lifestyles, but also more freedom when compared to living in Coastal Andhra, in close proximity to their husband's families.

Marriages within dominant caste groups are also expensive affairs where the bride's family often pays heavy dowry to the groom based on pre-marriage negotiations. Such negotiations have become ritualised and grooms working in the U.S.A. have more bargaining power to demand higher dowry. Landowning communities like the Kammas, Reddys and others have to incur huge costs at different stages of their daughter's life in recent times. The first time such high costs are incurred is when families pay for their daughters' education in pursuit of a professional degree. The second time such high costs are incurred is when families send their daughters to the U.S.A. to acquire an M.S. degree. The third instance when major expenditure is incurred is during the time of marriage. This last instance has a longer history and has shown more tenacity, whereas the first two reflect the changing gender norms in the region. Families with daughters and limited financial means often prioritise marriage expenditure over a foreign degree but to make their dream of having an NRI family member, they prefer to marry their daughters to grooms living abroad, preferably in the U.S.A. The migration trajectory of Lakshmi, one of my interlocutors, illustrates this point further.

Lakshmi's cousins were living in the U.S.A. since the early 2000s when she was of school-going age. One of her cousins had migrated to California after marrying an NRI in 2005, and the other more affluent cousin went to study computer science in a university in Ohio in 2003. Lakshmi had also nurtured dreams of going to the U.S.A., but because of her parents' limited income and assets, her family paid for her Bachelor of Pharmacy degree in India and reserved the expenses that they could have borne in providing her with a U.S. degree in anticipation of an NRI groom. Their strategy paid off when Lakshmi got married to a U.S.-based NRI living in Arizona in early 2016 and migrated a few months later. Her coveted NRI status was achieved after paying a heavy dowry in the form of a house, jewellery worth half a kilo of gold and some parcel of land in a village close to Guntur district.

Professional degrees acquired by women in India do not make all of them ready for the U.S. job market. Lakshmi knows that she will find it very difficult to get a job in the U.S.A. with her pharmacy degree unless she acquires a Master's degree, which in her case is unlikely because of the exorbitant cost of such courses in the U.S.A. Like some of the dependent Telugu women, she will remain a homemaker and her dowry can be seen as a trade-off that will compensate for her lack of job. However, just as the number of women migrating as students is on the rise, another parallel trend has also been noticed in the region. Increasingly, men search for 'right' partners whom they can take to the U.S.A. on dependent visas, but who have better possibilities of finding a job there post migration. For this, they prefer women who not only have professional degrees, preferably an engineering or medical one, but are already employed in reputable firms in India (see also Kirk, Bal, and Janssen 2017; Kōu, Mulder, and Bailey 2017). The idea of double American income is very lucrative for many families with a son in the U.S.A. who search for not only well-qualified brides but also look for girls who have the potential to easily convert their work experience in India into finding jobs in the U.S.A. The search for already

employed women has had repercussions in the dowry system in the Coastal Andhra region where now it is not uncommon for NRI families to eschew taking dowries in search of working brides for their sons. These developments are new but already point to the role high-skilled migration has on traditional structures of marriages. However, rather than reading these new developments as equalising the existing gender norms among high-skilled migrants, my research suggests that women continue to be the primary care giver after marriage. Moreover, since these marriages are endogamous, they point to the persistence of caste and kinship as key modalities of high-skilled migration from Coastal Andhra to the U.S.A. that shape a transnational habitus for dominant caste men and women in the region.

Shaping a transnational habitus

Beyond a materialist understanding of how Coastal Andhra produced 'knowledge workers' from among the dominant castes who employ kinship and caste capital to become a high-skilled migrant-sending community in Coastal Andhra, we need to understand the creation of aspiration to migrate to 'America', conditioned by a shared caste-inflected transnational habitus. This habitus is moulded through bifocal practices of being 'here' and 'there' simultaneously. Studying a transnational habitus created within a transnational social field of being and belonging where aspiring migrants already have family members, kin, friends, neighbours or villagers from one's caste in the U.S.A. is key to understanding why chain migration occurs within certain groups and from certain regional clusters in India, even among the high-skilled migrant pool.

The various forms of caste- and kinship-inflected transnational practices explained in this article have over time created a caste-inflected transnational habitus for communities like the Kammas. Kammas have put a premium on technical and professional education since many decades now. Today with strong patterns of outward migration of high-skilled professionals from the region, Kamma families in Coastal Andhra have acquired an embodied transnational disposition, whereby their tastes and demeanours and their competencies are shaped by living within a transnational social field that inextricably links the region to the U.S.A. This caste-inflected habitus has taken shape over decades drawing on material and immaterial forms of capital available to the community members. Today, many Kamma families, irrespective of their class, see the migration of their children to the West, preferably to the U.S.A., as a right of passage and strive to make their children 'migration ready'. Migration is a desirable or at times even inevitable eventuality for which many Kamma families are already prepared – emotionally and financially.

One must see migration strategies working at various levels. The decision to migrate is taken at a household level – investments in education and migration costs are borne by parents in most cases. Rarely, it is also decided on an individual level. But seeing these strategies only at the household decisions fails to contextualise how a caste-inflected transnational habitus is shaped where migration is seen as inevitable by members of only certain group and where a transnational social field centres the social position of the migrant (the dominant caste position of Kamma migrants in this case).

The literature on transnationalism suggests that systemic or structural shifts are occurring in migrant-sending places due to intense exchanges across borders and the deepening of transnational ties (Gardner 1995; Levitt 2001). The aspiration to migrate as a route to

upward mobility and progress has spread beyond the affluent class of Kammas to ordinary middle class and small farmer Kamma families – creating a regional culture of migration in which mobility is also equated with development. Migration is seen to transform the fortunes of the family, the community and the region. Consequently, the social lives of Kammas are infused with a transnational imagination or habitus, such that every parent desires to send their child to the U.S.A. to achieve social, economic and spatial mobility. This transnational aspiration does not exist in a deterritorialised imaginary space, however, but is spatially anchored in particular places such as towns and villages in Coastal Andhra, which become a key pivot for this mobility pattern, anchoring and emplacing social relations on a transnational plane. The social formations and transformations in the region have been a key factor that enabled Kammas to transform themselves from a regionally dominant caste into a well-educated, mobile and now transnational community.

Conclusion

Literature on kinship, ethnicity and chain migration and literature on high-skilled migrants have not established any cogent link with each other. Working on a tangent, both these groups of literature presuppose that different types of migrants utilise different channels to migrate. For instance, kinship (and caste, in the Indian context) is studied mostly when looking at underprivileged migration – poor migrants, illegal migrants or unskilled and semi-skilled workforce. On the other hand, studies on high-skilled migrants presuppose that knowledge workers depend on formal channels to migrate, rarely interrogating how social conditions in the home region create high-skilled migrant categories who deploy various forms of capital by virtue of their upper-caste, middle-class location. Further, some literature see skilled migrants merely as ‘agents’ of development in their home countries (Faist 2008; Kapur 2010), or as cog in the wheel of neo-liberalism/capitalism (Kamat, Mir, and Mathew 2004). This article is an attempt to bring these two groups of literature together to examine the role of caste and kinship in creating and sustaining high-skilled migration. What I have shown in this article is that migrants, including the high-skilled ones, not only rely on formal routes to migrate but strategically pair it with informal routes to become successful migrants. Further, I argue that a transnational social field approach that pays attention to regional particularities and histories can be useful to understand why only certain groups and regions emerge at the forefront of transnational migration.

Over the past several decades, Coastal Andhra has produced many high-skilled migrants like doctors, engineers and scientists from the dominant castes who have successfully manoeuvred spatial mobility and social upward mobility by utilising ‘caste capital’, thereby reproducing caste privileges on a transnational scale. Moreover, as the examples of Narendra, Sambasiva Rao’s brother or Lakshmi illustrate, networks of kinship, caste and endogamous transnational marriage alliances create a transnational habitus, which sees caste and kinship as vital nodes that link migrants’ places of origin and destination. As a result, aspirational and material migration pathways are etched between Coastal Andhra and the U.S.A., creating a transnational community, members of which are exclusively from the dominant caste.

Notes

1. All names used in this article are anonymised.
2. I conducted the interview with Narendra in Fairfax on 2 June 2012. He was 42 years old then.
3. Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) are premier public-funded autonomous institutes of higher education with an emphasis on high-quality technological education.
4. In India, 'settling down' usually refers to a life situation when one has a job and is married.
5. Telugu is the language spoken in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in South India. Those who speak this language are also referred to as Telugus.
6. Coastal Andhra refers to the fertile deltaic coastal region of Indian state of Andhra Pradesh and includes the districts of Guntur, Krishna, East and West Godavari. The region has a long history of social change and upward mobility among landowning caste groups. This region was chosen for research as it had produced a huge number of high-skilled migrants to the West, yet no ethnographic or anthropological account of such migration existed.
7. Srinivas (1959) coined the term 'dominant caste' to refer to a pattern of caste hierarchy found in most regions of India, wherein a single caste usually has control or ownership of most of the agricultural land, is numerically among the largest groups, and as a result holds a dominant position in the region or local area.
8. The concept of habitus was used as early as Aristotle but, in contemporary usage, was introduced by Marcel Mauss and later re-elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. Habitus, in brief, is the set of socially learnt dispositions, skills and ways of acting that are often taken for granted, and which are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life.
9. Refer to <http://migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states> for an update on the Indian diaspora in the USA (last accessed on 5 September 2015).
10. Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated into two different states in June 2014 – the truncated state of Andhra Pradesh and the newly carved state of Telangana. Hyderabad city was earlier the capital of united Andhra Pradesh, but after bifurcation, it became the capital of Telangana state.
11. NRI or non-resident Indian is a popularly used term in India for Indian migrants living abroad. The term also has a symbolic meaning of success attached to it.
12. H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa used by U.S. firms to employ overseas workers for jobs that require theoretical or technical expertise in specialised fields. The number of H-1B visas issued annually runs into a few thousands. H-1B visa holders are allowed to bring their immediate family members (spouse and children under 21) to the U.S.A. under the H4 visa category.

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