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For Love and Money:
Second-Generation Indian Americans
in the Indian Knowledge Economy

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Abstract

International migration flows tend to be viewed in the context of persons moving from developing to developed nations for better opportunities. However, the recent economic success of many developing countries and consequent return of immigrants to the homeland have sparked lively debates surrounding transnational mobility, identity and “reverse brain drain.” Perhaps more surprising is the “return migration” of second-generation professionals from developed nations to their parents’ homelands in emerging economies. This paper examines the puzzle of why highly skilled, second-generation Indian Americans relocate from the US to India. Interviews with respondents reveal that career advancement and a desire to deepen their attachments to India are primary reasons for relocation. This paper moves beyond sociological themes of second-generation assimilation or integration in the host society and underscores the salience of the parents’ homeland.

My mother called me -- I met this girl for you. She lives in America and we want you to meet her. But they are wondering why you live in India. It's like a whole reverse thing, because usually the guy is in America -- the whole stereotype thing, the girl is in India and you have to bring her back. She said -- the family is very confused, they came to visit apparently -- first of all, I was like -- *ma*, why are they coming? She said -- oh they came to the house and they saw that we have been living here all our lives. They thought like - they assumed that my parents had just moved to the US two years back and that the kids are still in India. They were very confused why I am here-- so anyway, I think it's very humorous -- the whole reverse -- but the point is that I never grew up with the fact that I'm going to live in India.

Gaurav, 32, New Delhi

When I met Anjuⁱ in her New Delhi office in May 2008, she was wearing a fitted *salwar kameez*ⁱⁱ and in the midst of rebuking the office peon for failing to regularly attend the conversational English classes in which she had enrolled him, spending \$100 a month for the past two months. Three years prior, 23 year-old Anju was living in suburban New Jersey and “into punk and indie rock, New Jersey American stuff, you know.” Two years ago, she decided to relocate to India after unsuccessfully trying to shrug off what she describes was a “persistent and gnawing realization” of her unfamiliarity with Indian heritage and culture. Anju, a recent college graduate and then an operations analyst with a software company in New Jersey, began looking for job opportunities in the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector. To the dismay of her twin sister and parents, she soon accepted a job with a software company in Hyderabad. Anju’s transition from a “typical Jersey girl” to “return migrant”ⁱⁱⁱ is a statement about how many second-generation^{iv} Indian Americans are considering moving to their parents’ native country for both professional and personal reasons. While emerging economies in the parents’ homeland may motivate the children to make an economic investment there (Foner 2002), these second-generation adults are also evaluating what the label ‘Indian American’ means to them and how living in India as independent adults links them to their “Indianness.”

Theoretical Framework

Anju's decision to work in India occurs in an era of increasing globalization. Technological advances, an economic slowdown in developed nations, and emerging economies in developing countries have altered traditional South to North migration patterns, at least for many high skilled^v migrants. The sociological literature describes the movement of such persons from the global North to South alternately as "brain gain", "brain circulation" and "reverse brain drain"(Saxenian 2002). Reflecting these new forms of mobility, scholars have studied the *return migration* of immigrants, often from developed nations to their homelands in developing nations. One scholar lists the explanations of return migration through neo-classical economics, structural approach, new economics of labor markets, social networks and transnational theories (Cassarino 2004). However, much of this research tends to focus on older, economically well-established returnees who wish to retire, fulfill family obligations or advance their careers in the homeland (Guarnizo 1997); we know little about second-generation "return migrants." Most studies on the second-generation emphasize their assimilation or integration in the host society and neglect the influences of the home society in their daily lives (King and Christou 2008). Discussions on second-generation members are more likely to focus on the cultural rather than the economic domain; many in the second generation are young and so evidence of their economic embeddedness is still limited (Perlmann 2002).

Research on second-generation Indian Americans has addressed issues such as intergenerational messages and conflicts; describing the tensions between Indian immigrant parents and their children on topics such as parental pressure to excel at school, dating and the choice of a marriage partner (Bacon 1996; see Zhou 2006 for interactions between immigrant Chinese parents and children). A study of US-based immigrants from the Indian state of Kerala finds that it is not unusual for families to send their adolescent children to Kerala to "protect them from the terrors of American teenage freedoms" (George 2005:168). Levitt's (2009) research on second-generation Gujaratis in the New England area notes parents' efforts to embed children in Indian cultural and religious associations in both nations.

Fewer studies describe the transnational social and cultural ties second-generation Indians maintain with the 'home' country. Maira (2002) argues that for South Asian American youth in New York City, *desi bhangra*^{vi} parties serve as a tool to affirm their ethnic identity. In a 2005 study on second-generation South Asians in the US, Purkayastha notes that most of her respondents maintain contact with extended family abroad and define such relationships in terms of closeness and a sense of mutual obligation. Respondents use a variety of cultural tools, such as dancing, movies, fashion and literature to assert their ethnicity. She offers examples of how respondents negotiate overt and covert racial boundaries by relying on transnational family networks to subvert the racial challenges they encounter in the US, despite their academic achievement and professional affiliations. In contrast, Bacon (2004) argues that the transnational activities undertaken by second-generation Indian-Americans, such as visits to India, reinforce their global identity as opposed to a transnational or an Indian identity. To summarize, studies have examined the cultural experiences of South Asians in the host country, but ignore their economic embeddedness in the parents' homeland.

The nascent but emerging scholarship on second-generation "return migrants" has been primarily from a European perspective. Topics studied include motivations to "return" and problems with readjustment upon moving to the parents' homeland (Philips and Potter 2005, 2006; Rodman and Conway 2005; Potter and Conway 2005); shifts in identity and constructions of "home" and belonging (Christou 2006; Wessendorf 2007; King and Christou 2008) and the gendered character of their experiences upon relocation (Reynolds 2008). These studies illuminate not only the struggles and successes members of the second-generation experience in their parents' homeland but also reveal that the very act of 'return' is often made possible *because* second-generation members maintain transnational ties to the homeland prior to migration. Missing from these analyses, however, is the puzzle of why *highly skilled*, second-generation members relocate from developed nations to their parents' homeland in developing countries.

In this paper, I examine the motivations of second-generation Indian American professionals who migrate from the US to India to work in sectors such as IT, finance

and media; sectors that have accelerated India's integration into the world economy (Heitzman 2004; Lane and Schmukler 2007). This study differs from existing studies on "return migrants." First, in contrast with most studies that examine the experiences of working class migrants who "return", I study high skilled migrants who "return." Second, this study illuminates the connections among economy, nation and transnationalism among second-generation members who relocate from a developed to a developing country. In other words, I extend the debate beyond integration in the host society to examine their personal and professional connections with the home and host societies. Third, I focus on a relatively narrow but understudied stream of migrants; although they constitute only a small proportion of their population in the US, such a study is crucial as it illuminates the formation and persistence of emergent migration streams during a time of significant global economic and power shifts from Western nations to Asia's rising economies.

Specifically, I address the question of why second-generation Indian Americans migrate to India, given that a) they self-describe as young urban professionals who are well integrated in the American mainstream and b) such movement occurred not due to a job loss or the current economic downturn in the US; all interviewees relocated to India before the start of the economic recession in the US. I show how respondents move to India for reasons of career advancement. Also important are personal connections to India, influenced by messages of intergenerational cultural reproduction, or "the passing on of traditions and affiliations from one generation to another" (Kibria 2009:28).

To understand the economic and cultural factors that might explain the "return migration" of people like Anju, I present a contextual background of their formative years growing up in the US as children of Indian immigrant parents.

Methods

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 47 second-generation Indian Americans professionals living in India for at least six months prior to the time of interview. The adults that are the focus of this study are the children of the largely professional Indian immigrants that migrated post-1965 to the US after a change in US immigration laws to attract high skilled immigrants with "special occupational skills."^{vii} All respondents were American citizens, and were born or raised in the US before the age of nine. I conducted interviews in the cities of New Delhi^{viii} (19), Hyderabad (12) and Mumbai (16). I chose these cities as strategic research sites as they are central to the global economy through their participation in knowledge industries, software and IT services and biotech advancements (Friedman 2005).

To recruit respondents, I established personal contacts with second-generation migrants through *snowball sampling*. To reduce the likelihood of bias and expand the range of the sample, I attempted to limit the number of contacts gained through any one respondent to two persons. I also recruited respondents through expatriate email lists, expatriate clubs and professional networking associations for expatriates in the three cities. Interviews were conducted in two phases, during the summer of 2008 and spring of 2009. In addition, during the second phase of data collection, I revisited seven returnees I interviewed during the first phase of research. Interviews lasted between one hour and a half and three hours. Almost all interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

The mean age of respondents was 29.8 years and included approximately equal numbers of men and women. All respondents attended high school and received an undergraduate degree in the US. Close to 70% of them had a Master's degree or higher from prestigious universities in the US or UK. 14 of the 47 (approximately 30% of the sample) respondents were married, but of them, I only interviewed the spouses of two couples. Respondents held professional jobs in the US before voluntarily relocating to India and most of them moved to India in 2006 and early 2007, before visible signs of the economic downturn in the US. At the time of interview, they had been living in India

on average for approximately 25 months and visited India between 5 and 15 times prior to making the decision to move^{ix}.

Juxtaposing Indian and American Lives

Interviewees grew up in households that were linked to India in a variety of ways. Parents retained ties with family in India through letters, weekly telephone calls and monetary remittances. In many instances, upon acquiring US citizenship, they sponsored relatives to migrate to the US. Parents' usually prepared Indian meals at home and escorted children to Indian cultural events or dance classes at Indian temples or associations when possible. Several respondents spoke of visiting other Indian families over weekends and holidays. Parents attempted to converse with children in the native language, and while most respondents noted that they "somewhat-to-completely" understood an Indian language, about half of them were less sure of their ability to hold a conversation in the language. Like the second-generation Bangladeshi American respondents whose parents took them on trips to Bangladesh or urged them to consider marrying a Bangladeshi (Kibria 2009), respondents spoke of similar strategies parents employed to increase their awareness of Indian culture. Typically, respondents visited India every two or three years and often spent the entire summer holidays with cousins. These visits decreased over time as they began pursuing internships and other interests in the US during school vacations. Respondents noted parents' efforts in teaching them Indian^x values such as cultivating habits of thrift, excelling at school and maintaining close-knit ties with extended family. However, they were quick to point out that they embraced their 'Americanness' when it came to choices of career advancement, privacy, marriage decisions and independence. Indeed, a recent study on second-generation Indian American adults finds that they, like their parents, adopt the model minority label and are more likely to incorporate "elements of their ethnic, racial, and American lifestyles" exemplifying what the author describes as "lived hybridity" (Dhingra 2007:8).

Indeed, the second-generation members I interviewed may be characterized as "structurally integrated" with reference to education and employment achievements and

“selectively acculturated” as they embrace both ethnic and American identities (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). But in general, respondents did not maintain dense connections with the parents’ homeland. In contrast to a study on second-generation Mexican Americans who participated transnationally in rituals and practices in both Mexico and New York on a regular basis (Smith 2006), their transnational ties were fewer and less formal.

I do not wish to suggest that the above descriptions accurately capture the diversity in the lives of all interviewees; there was definitely variability in the intensity of their experiences. Indeed, the brief life stories of three returnees’ – Mala, Anand and Rajnish respectively – illustrate their diverse experiences growing up in the US from the mid 1970s onward, varied contexts of reception and reasons to move to India.

Mala: From Shunning to Embracing India

Now in her mid-twenties, Mala (pronounced Māla) was born in the Indian city of Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar. Mala’s *tauji* (father’s elder brother), a doctor in the US, sponsored her family and so her father migrated to New York in the late seventies and worked as a financial analyst. Her mother remained in India until Mala was three, then joined her father and began a residency program to train as a pediatrician. Because her parents were beginning and building their careers in the US, Mala remained in India under the care of her grandparents in Patna. At the age of six, she embarked on her maiden flight to New York to live with her parents.

Although she had attended an English-medium school in Patna, Mala recalled her inability to understand the accents of her teachers and classmates in her public school in Manhattan. The different baby sitters who tended to her and her younger sister aggravated the unfamiliarity of her new life; her mother was often away working in a city hospital for two or three nights in a row as part of her residency requirement. Soon, her parents found it financially difficult to support both children. Mala, being older, returned to India at the age of seven for a year, while her sister remained in the US. Mala described coming to view Patna “as a place of warmth and love and place of grandparents, a place where we had a car and driver.” Still, the periodic separation from

her parents at a young age was traumatic and for many years after that, “coming to India was really scary because I didn't want to be left there. I had this fear in my mind -- what if my parents leave me here and abandon me?”

Upon moving back to the US, Mala soon adjusted to her new life, excelling at school and making friends. Consistent with another study of second-generation South Asians in the US (Purkayastha 2005) she recounts her parents' efforts in teaching them Indian traditions and her subsequent dislike for all things Indian.

I was one of those kids who never wanted to be left out and I needed to fit in. I wanted to be blond and blue-eyed and look like Barbie and be just like all the other girls. I pushed India away for the longest time, I didn't want to come, I didn't want my mother to play Bollywood music in the car. I hated the fact that she would constantly cook Indian food. They would only speak Hindi in the home and to us and I didn't want Indian culture forced down my throat, which was happening at that time because we would constantly get screamed at - *tum hindi bolo, hindi kyun nahin bolti ho?* (talk in Hindi, why don't you talk in Hindi?). It was so hard for me because my name was so hard. For an Indian my name is very easy, but I had to struggle - Mala is very simple but for an American tongue it's hard to say Māla because it's not natural. Even from first grade I was too shy to say it's Māla. They would say Māla, your name is Māla. It's interesting what happens now, because friends I've had for 14 years -- I went back the last couple of years and I said okay -- you cannot call me Māla anymore, it's not my name. I don't associate myself with that name or the way it sounds. I wouldn't even answer if someone is yelling Māla, Māla (*smile*).

Thus, for Mala, the need to 'fit in' during the school years was so acute that she refused to correct friends who mispronounced her name or sit in the car if her mother played Hindi music. For her undergraduate studies, she joined a predominantly white, small liberal arts college in Massachusetts with a strong *desi* community but avoided any activity or person on campus remotely connected to India. During her senior year in 2002, she reluctantly enrolled in a class on India on her advisor's suggestion. As part of the curriculum, students traveled around India for ten days, observing call centers and IT firms and absorbing the rapid changes occurring in India's economic landscape post-liberalization. Being the only person of Indian origin in her class, she felt a sense of empowerment as the de-facto class ambassador but sadness at her limited

conversational Hindi skills, how little she knew the country and how her early childhood experiences had pushed her away from India.

Upon graduation and on the insistence of her advisor, she hesitantly accepted a three-month internship to work for one of the first American companies to outsource a portion of its operations to India. She moved to Delhi in 2002 and described her time working with an all-Indian team as “an incredibly enriching and amazing experience.” Thereupon, she relocated to the US for two years to work with the same company. She then moved to London to obtain a masters degree in Public and Economic Policy. “That’s when it happened. I fell in love in India. It was funny that it happened in London, it was through a series of small and big events” she explained, “at this point I had mentally developed enough that I started listening to myself more and less to others. My gut was saying it is time for you to go; it’s time for you to get out of Europe, go to India. So I made a decision, and I moved here in the summer of 2006 in August -- that was 2.5 years ago.” In her first job post-masters, Mala joined an American consulting company as a local hire in Gurgaon and received a commensurate Indian salary. Her parents were dismayed that their daughter, educated in the finest schools in the US and UK, would take a severe pay cut to live in Delhi, a city considered unsafe for women. However, Mala stood resolute: she had grown up to be a ‘non-Indian Indian’ who did not know her country on her terms; it was time to move to India and rectify that.

Anand: American with a Dash of “Indianness”

In the late sixties, Anand’s father moved from Delhi to Bloomington, Indiana to pursue a master’s degree in Engineering. His mother received a PhD in Biology in India, and moved to the US after her marriage. Anand, now 33 years-old, was born in California. At the time of interview, his parents and younger brother were living in the Bay Area and working in the IT industry.

Growing up in California, Anand observed that his family appeared to be more assimilated into American culture, in sharp contrast with his Chinese-American friends. In his early years, his parents tried teaching him their native language, Sindhi. Chuckling, he explained their frustration at the slow pace of his progress in learning Sindhi; they

soon switched to conversing in English with his younger brother and him. His parents regularly transferred money to support relatives in India and made phone calls to talk to extended family, but seldom visited India. Indeed, Anand had visited India only two times prior to relocating to Mumbai in December 2006.

Unlike the case of Mala, Anand had few memories of parental efforts to familiarize children with Indian food, culture or traditions. The family celebrated some Hindu festivals but from a social rather than a religious standpoint. For Anand, the only time he felt connected to India was when he visited his parents' friends' houses. Their social life centered on visiting other Indian families every weekend or other weekend for parties and informal gatherings. At these parties, he spent long hours watching Hindi movies with other Indian kids, and became very fond of a famous Indian actor, Amitabh Bachchan.

We are part of the Sindhi community so I feel like every week or every other week somebody would be having an Indian party and the kids would be there and we would watch TV. I actually grew up watching Amitabh Bachchan – *Amar Akbar Anthony* was one of my favorite movies! I knew Amitabh Bachchan but I never really watched Hindi movies at home. It wasn't like my parents would put on the TV and I would watch Amitabh Bachchan movies. In the party someone would put it on and we would all watch it because it was all Indian parties.

Anand was exposed to 'Indianness' only at social gatherings with other Indian families ("I never watched Hindi movies at home"), had few Indian friends ("only my parents' friends' children, but we were not really friends"), seldom ate Indian food after a certain age ("my brother refused to eat Indian food from about the age of ten") and visited India only two times, despite the family's comfortable socio-economic position. His statements suggest a lack of regular connection to his Indian background. After obtaining an undergraduate degree in Economics and masters in Computer Science from a top university in Massachusetts, Anand returned to California in 1998. Along with his parents and two friends from graduate school, in classic Silicon Valley style, he started an e-commerce business in his garage to sell custom-built golf equipment. The business rapidly expanded to employ about 200 people. Two years later, they sold the business upon which he relocated to New York, and for six years, worked for a consulting

company and then a software company. During his stay in New York, he married a second-generation Indian American, Sheela, and they contemplated relocating to India. Anand spoke excitedly about his passion for creating and running companies, and Mumbai seemed like an ideal venue to pursue his interests. He explained the thought process behind their decision to relocate:

We started thinking -- every time we came to India -- after marrying her; we came to India more because she has very close family here. So we would come at least every other year if not every year that we would end up coming to India. Every time we would come to India, we would say that there is so much going on here. In a way it was less about economic opportunity and more about an opportunity for Sheela and me to do something different and interesting, like a life experience. I wasn't like I don't have an identity, but I think that it would be great to be more Indian and more in touch with India and better understand the people, the culture, the country. As I told you, I didn't learn very much from my parents.

Unlike Mala, Anand's decision to relocate was not primarily influenced by a need to reconnect with India. However, a life course transition, in his case marriage, opened the possibility of living and working in India (see also Levitt and Waters 2002; Smith 2006)

Rajnish: At Ease Straddling Both Worlds

Now approaching his mid-thirties, Rajnish was born in Pune, India. When he was four months old, the family moved to Boston, where his father worked as an engineer and his mother worked part-time in administrative capacities in different organizations. The family relocated within the US every couple of years, moving from Boston to New Jersey, Chicago and finally settled in Indiana, where his father established a company that supplied farm equipment and his mother became a homemaker. Rajnish spent most of his childhood in a predominantly white, small town in Southern Indiana; there were few Indian or South Asian families in the area. He credited his parents for teaching him Hindi, which he explained with a grin, was a long and arduous task for them.

Most of my upbringing was in a small town, and so I was very disconnected, and no interactions with brown people [laugh]. My first interactions, besides my cousins, close friends were probably in college.

But I was perfectly comfortable with Americans and Indians. I had a Jain upbringing and was vegetarian for a long while. Up until eighth grade, I would come back every single year, three months every year and so I grew up with my cousins. From eighth grade on to the end of college, I didn't go -- I just came back once or twice for my sister's wedding and things like that. I would always go to Pune and Indore and have a great time because my mom's family is very, very wealthy -- even I'm shocked at how wealthy they are. My other Indian friends in the US would always say that it sucks because their parents are from small villages in Gujarat.

At an early age, Rajnish became aware of being racially different from the other kids in his neighborhood, a white, middle class suburb. This awareness sharpened when he attended "a very very white upper-middle-class private high school." Despite being the only non-white student in his class and only one of four in his school and wanting to "fit in," Rajnish explained that he did not feel excluded or marginalized. When I asked him to elaborate further, he hesitated and noted that he was unable to explain why that was so, but that he felt very American and Indian. According to him, he was completely at ease with both his 'white' friends in the US and Indian cousins in India, perhaps *because* the two worlds did not intersect. It was only when he went to college and began befriending Indian Americans that he started to embrace his Indian identity. Rajnish made the decision to relocate to India in 2005 when he attended his cousins' wedding in Pune. At that time, he was working in the US for a multinational IT company as a business development analyst for emerging markets and so frequently traveled to India. He noticed exciting changes in India's economic climate every time he visited the country:

I've been in the technology sector and then in 2005 I read something about money exchanges going electronic. I've always wanted to deal with the stock market and do something, the money exchanges were going to go online in India. I came down for my cousins wedding and at that time, I met a couple of different brokers who said that if you come down we can start a fund together. I came down to do roadshows and I realized at that time that you really have to be on the ground; out of sight, out of mind. So then I said okay -- I stay here for six months and set the whole thing up. I thought that it would be fascinating and meaningful to do that where my parents grew up. Then I met my wife [an Indian] and have never gone back. Two years later, here I am (*smile*).

I learned that Rajnish had recently left the IT industry to start a commodity hedge fund. During the course of our conversation, Rajnish spoke candidly about how despite being close to his cousins in India, as a young adult in the US, he had resolved to “never move to India, never marry an Indian from India, and never marry anyone with an Indian accent” but now was happily violating his three self-imposed rules.

To summarize, these three cases reveal returnees’ varied childhood and life experiences. Growing up in both small towns and big cities, some respondents were instructed by parents to follow certain traditions and norms in the household; others remember only sporadic events, such as festivals, where they actively celebrated their “Indianness.” Nevertheless, there were certain patterns. Parents, to varying degrees, were successful in teaching their children to understand, if not speak, an Indian language. Most respondents experienced feeling racially different during their school years, and viewed college as a time when they began to appreciate their Indian identity. They contended that their attachments to India were not motivated by a need to achieve or reaffirm status in India or the US. This is in contrast to a study on second-generation Mexican Americans in New York for whom transnational attachments were a way to seek and reaffirm their identity and status in the host and home society (Smith 2006). Finally, they spoke of moving to India for economic and non-economic reasons, and for purposes of clarity, I describe them in two separate sections. I show how respondents articulate life in India as doubly beneficial - instrumental in advancing their careers as well as being personally enriching.

Jumping up the Corporate Ladder

Returnees' incentives to relocate to India was shaped less by 'push factors' such as unemployment or a fear of job loss in the US; more by 'pull factors' such as access to challenging professional opportunities in the emerging Indian economy, opportunities respondents claimed were simply not available in the US at that point to persons of their age and years of work experience. In describing their professional reasons to move, it is important to note that they did not attribute it to the presence of a "glass

ceiling", racism, or other such factors. Rather, it was a desire to move beyond "doing the same old thing" and benefit from the experience of working in the global economy.

Angela, a 28-year-old single woman, articulates the upside of working in an emerging economy. Born and raised in New Jersey, Angela graduated in finance from an Ivy League University in the Northeast region of the US. She then worked for a multinational financial consulting company in New York. When the company advertised a job opportunity in India, she lobbied for it and subsequently moved to Noida in 2007. Angela soon realized that she did not enjoy consulting work due to the constant traveling it entailed; she had made 14 round-trips between New Delhi and New York in one year. After about a year of working with the company, she moved to an Indian company in New Delhi. She noted that the job responsibilities at both companies were exponentially more challenging than anything she had previously undertaken; it would take her many years to shoulder the same level of responsibility in the US. When we met at a coffee shop in an affluent New Delhi neighborhood, she explained:

Companies try to use their assets as much as they can, when I started looking for a new job here, people were hiring - they were looking at jobs [for me] way above my level of responsibility. I mean, it would take me 5 to 8 years to climb to get to that level of responsibility in a managerial job in the US. So they want to hire people who they think have a high level of competence. Also, accents matter. Sometimes people hire you for the accent. I mean, it definitely has an impact, I'm not debating that. Both my organizations are pretty global so already the culture is global. Back at my last company. I was put on the cold-calling team in business, and it was obvious why they would want to do that, because of my accent. [Even if you have fleeting ties to India] and if you've worked in a few other countries and you have fluency with that or you can demonstrate that you have fluency with that, you are golden.

On account of their American accents, others spoke of having to assume the responsibility of company spokesperson. For example, professionals in a range of industry sectors across the three cities narrated similar work expectations. They were often asked to interact with overseas clients, assist in fund raising, public relations events and such efforts that were outside the purview of their work. They remarked that the relationship between employers and expatriates was symbiotic - companies in developing economies increasingly seek to project a global workforce, as it is a powerful

marketing tool to gain visibility, while expatriates in turn gain valuable work experience, attractive salaries and perquisites.

Like Angela, Nitin is exemplar of a professional working in a dynamic economy. As a 31-year-old Chief Officer of a chain of pharmaceutical companies in Hyderabad, Nitin was extremely articulate and exuded confidence. The interview took place in his compact and basic work cubicle in a distinctly middle-class neighborhood in Hyderabad. Nitin had migrated to the US when he was two months old and was raised in New Jersey. Before enrolling in an MBA in a top-tier university in the Northeast, he had worked for a few years in a US-based start-up company and acquired skill sets in finance. After graduation, he joined a consulting company, attracted in part by its generous financial compensation. At the same time, one of his Indian friends from graduate school, Jay, returned to India to establish his own chain of medical stores countrywide. Nitin explained how that set the ball rolling for him:

For one, I was insanely bored with my company in the US. I found that you learn a huge amount when you are actually doing the work and not just advising. After business school, I wanted to go back on the operating side but part of it became the lure of money. Jay was a classmate [in business school]. Jay had started this company [in India] and I was working with him on a weekly basis, giving him advice. Paragon is the largest chain of medical shops and has been there for 15 years, we have only been for 2, 2.5 years. We will very soon surpass Paragon and be Number 1. It's an amazing growth story and it's an incredible company. I was giving the company a lot of advice and I saw what was going on here and I said – I told Jay, why don't I just work for you? I thought I'd be coming in at a little more junior level. He said be the CO [Chief Officer] and be the Head of Marketing as well. I kind of thought about it and said look, at this age, who really was going to give me an opportunity like that? I thought, if I could do this, I could really accelerate my career in a big way. India has obviously an interesting growth story. It could really give me some practical experience that could be used. That kind of stuff, so I thought, you know, I'll do it. I took a huge salary cut to come here but it's been hugely rewarding in terms of experience.

Thus, a recurring theme among many returnees' narratives was that it was logical to move to India, given the rapid maturity of the Indian markets and consequent shortage of experienced professionals, especially with the growth in new industries such

as retail and media. Indeed, according to *Time Magazine*, National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), India's leading software and outsourcing industry body, foresees a shortage of half a million IT professionals by 2010, mostly because existing graduates lack the "soft skills" needed to fit into a cosmopolitan work environment (Singh 2008).

In addition to professional reasons, returnees articulated a desire to "go back to where it all began," sharpen their awareness of Indian culture and build an independent relationship with India.

India Tugs at your Heartstrings

As I have shown, available opportunities in the Indian economy were crucial in facilitating the 'return' of the second-generation. In addition to career advancement, returnees' articulated a desire to connect in meaningful and intimate ways to the country of their parents' birth, and in some cases, their birth. In the interviews, I asked returnees' if they had considered moving to other emerging economies to pursue similar professional pathways. They remarked on their disinclination to work in China, Brazil or other emerging markets; apart from being culturally and linguistically dissimilar, they had no personal attachments to these countries. In analyzing their stories, I found that relocation was shaped in large part due to parental messages of intergenerational cultural reproduction.

One rainy summer afternoon in May 2008, I interviewed Pavitra, a 32-year-old Anchor Correspondent at one of India's leading national business dailies. We met at her spacious bungalow in a trendy New Delhi neighborhood. Over coconut-flavored skim milk lattes, I learned that Pavitra was born in Queens, New York and continued to live there until she moved to New Delhi in late 2006. A graduate in International Relations from New York, she worked for six years as a management consultant in Manhattan. In terms of work, Pavitra described being "tired of doing the same old thing." After the birth of her daughter, she and her Indian American husband made a joint decision to relocate to New Delhi; he "was bitten by the entrepreneurial bug" and wanted to establish an IT consulting company in India. She added, "I always wanted to get into

media and India was a place that I could try something like that,” given the rapid growth in the media industry. The couple also wished to raise their daughter in an Indian environment, but, as I illustrate below, had mixed feelings about raising her in New Delhi or New York. In New Delhi, she helped her husband start his company and a few months later, joined a business daily. During the course of the interview, I learned that Pavitra was fluent in Hindi and Gujarati, vegetarian, familiar with Gujarati customs and rituals and hoped her daughter would be as connected to her roots. She recounted the tumultuousness of her growing up years, during which time she resented learning Gujarati and constantly lied to her parents about her social life and dating choices. However, after the birth of her daughter, she grew more appreciative of what she describes as a "top-down" style of parenting. She explained:

I want my child to grow up knowing that she is Indian. She speaks Hindi and that's very important. But the decision for me that is hard is do I want to raise her here, or what do I want to raise her there? But over there, there's a lot going on there that I don't want her to be exposed to. So I'm feeling very torn right now because I don't know. The environment here and health issues, you know and the education system... so those are the things. Lately, I just feel that kids in the US are growing very fast, seriously. You just walk down the street in New York, and you see what the young girls are wearing, you know, they are so exposed. So I'm kind of conservative now that I have a daughter and I know what it means. I used to give my mom a hard time (*rolling her eyes*), but I now know what it feels. It is something that was passed down, and at that time I hated my parents for being conservative, but now I know what it means to be Indian and hold these values.

Pavitra's statement about the importance of raising her daughter according to Indian culture reflects the gendered character of many migration decisions and the commonly held view by many immigrant families that children have too many freedoms in the US (see Foner 2009). Her parents had forced “Indian values” upon her, but upon motherhood, she grew to appreciate the importance of those values. Her narrative illustrates the influences of parental messages after a life course transition. Nevertheless, like many other respondents, Pavitra remarked with a mix of humor and sadness of her parents’ dismay when she tried to convince them to see her viewpoint about moving to India. Indeed, as with her parents, other parents argued that they had migrated to the

US to give their children better opportunities and alternatively pleaded, emotionally threatened or rationalized with them to return to the US.

In other instances, I found that men and women alike hoped to deepen their awareness of Indian culture. For instance, Shaina, a 30-year-old economic analyst with a US firm, actively lobbied to move to Delhi for professional and personal growth. Shaina's parents moved to the US in 1984, when her father's brother, a doctor who had migrated to the US a decade earlier, sponsored the family. She described growing up in a lower middle class household in Texas; her parents initially worked in the food industry and were now shift managers at a local restaurant. In the first twenty years of her life, the family could only afford to make two trips to India. At the time of interview, her parents had not visited India in 15 years, due to financial constraints. Shaina's decision to migrate is influenced in part by concerns regarding the depth of her knowledge on India:

India, I think I *wanted* to live here as an adult. It was definitely grunt work [in the US], but I worked for the decision-makers to get this job. I pushed for India and the job that was listed was a good professional job, working for economic issues and that would be challenging for me because it was at a higher level and to move up in the organization. I wanted to come to India, as I said, for personal reasons- to learn the language, religion, my culture and where I come from. I think if I look back on the past couple of years I've done some of that but I haven't done as much as I thought I would have or would have really got into the heart of these things. I learned a lot about India and Indians and just my terminology of it. Like, when I say that I came here for professional reasons and personal reasons yeah sure, I knew that in 3 years I would be 30 and I factored that in. I thought that maybe in 3 years I would have this Indian wedding. So yeah, if I guess and think about it more, there's a certain comfort, a certain familiarity and a certain understanding that I share with Indians. Like traveling here, maybe raising our kids in a certain Indian way, I worry about that. I don't know. My job, my religion, my culture, what am I going to pass on to them that is Indian? Except for some very superficial kinds of things that I've carried on, but I guess in some ways, that was what was passed on to me, I don't know.

Explicit in Shaina's story is a realization that many of her questions concerning India went unanswered. Upon completion of the interview, I switched off the digital

voice recorder and we continued talking. It was then that she told me that during her growing up years in the US, her parents spent long hours working to make ends meet. When Shaina was growing up, her mother could seldom talk about India without breaking into tears; she missed her family in India but they could not afford to visit the country. Soon, Shaina learned to avoid mentioning India, as she associated the word with making her parents unhappy. Thus, we see that in Shaina's case, a lack of parental messages fueled in her a desire to live in India. As an adult, she wanted to gain a deeper understanding of her religion and culture, and began to question her constructions, images and meanings of India and 'Indianness'. She was also open to meeting a potential spouse, Indian or Indian American, while living in India.

Shaina's comment about meeting a like-minded Indian or Indian American resonated with the majority of single interviewees. They articulated a desire to meet culturally similar marriage partners, preferably Indian Americans and to a lesser extent, 'well traveled' Indians who had preferably lived some portion of their life abroad. The rationale behind this was that a person from India or of Indian origin would have greater familiarity with Indian culture and share a greater comfort zone with the family. Further, someone who had spent a significant amount of time in India exhibited flexibility and adaptability, and he or she would be more likely to enjoy living in India. Still, Rahul, a 31-year-old man working in a multinational IT company in Hyderabad noted with some resignation that it had been tough to find a compatible partner by dating and he had contemplated finding a spouse through the 'semi-arranged marriage' route in India. How did he come to the decision that a semi-arranged marriage was acceptable? He noted that over the last few years, he had grown to see the logic of his parents' view that equated it to an "arranged blind date" that may or may not work. He added, "I have been trained very well by my parents. I can't make big decisions without their involvement." He was skeptical of meeting someone just once and falling in love, but not averse to meeting someone through the mediation of his parents or extended family in India. Ironically, he explained that his failure to meet a potential spouse in this manner stemmed from the fact that it was no longer a common phenomenon in urban, affluent India.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have attempted to address the question of why second-generation Indian American professionals relocate to India. High skilled migrants view overseas work experience as valuable international exposure and a competitive advantage in a global economy (Amit 2002) and I demonstrate that interviewees move to India for the same reasons. However, they deliberately choose to move to India because they have or hope to establish a personal connection with the country. Thus, the nation-state holds salience for them; they resemble the transnational capitalist class^{xi} (Sklair 1995; 2005) but differ from it in important ways. I use the term *transnational ethnics* to describe the second-generation professionals that constitute my sample. They are *transnational* because their frames of reference are the US and India and their lives are influenced by economic, social and cultural events in both countries. They are *ethnics* because place, in this case, assumes significance. Though economic opportunities in India are a significant impetus, respondents also migrate to build an independent relationship with the country of their parents' birth. In other words, shared racial and cultural affiliations *with India* constitute key factors in their decision to move.

While scholarship has drawn attention to first-generation or recently arrived immigrants' transnational ties to their home countries, we know less about the extent to which the second-generation internalizes these ties, whether by having access to intergenerational family messages, such as through family visits to the home country or messages that emphasize one's ethnicity. In describing the narratives of returnees, I have attempted to highlight the ways in which interviewees actively articulate a sense of belonging to India, invoking both notions of individual choice and the influences of intergenerational family messages in shaping their decision to maintain or deepen their connections with the country. My research also suggests the importance of class. Respondents possess human and cultural capital, which make them valuable resources in both the US and Indian contexts. Indeed, such capital affords them the luxury to initially choose to move to India, as they are secure in the knowledge that they would continue to advance their careers if or when they returned to the US.

Future research may be directed toward expanding the methodological and theoretical scope of this study by adding a longitudinal perspective and tracking how the changing global economic order affects returnees choice of career and residence. Such an analysis will provide insights into the multiple causal factors, micro and macro, that affect their movement.

Endnotes:

ⁱ To protect the privacy of informants, I have changed the names of all persons and the companies they work in.

ⁱⁱ Traditional dress worn by both women and men in South Asia.

ⁱⁱⁱ I follow Christou (2006:833) who recognizes that the term “return” is a misnomer because the second-generation cannot “return” to a place they actually never left in the first place. Here, “return” and “return migration” refers to “relocation to an acknowledged homeland.”

^{iv} Here, the second-generation includes children born in the US (to one or both Indian immigrant parents) or who migrated from India to the US by age 12 (Portes and Zhou 1993).

^v I follow Iredale (2001) who notes that high skilled migrants usually hold university degrees or have substantial expertise in a given field.

^{vi} Desi is a colloquial term that refers to persons from the Indian sub continent. Bhangra, originating in Punjab, India consists of folk music and dance, and is increasingly popular worldwide.

^{vii} Also included are respondents who migrated to the US in the seventies and early eighties under family sponsorship; relatives who formed part of the 1965 wave sponsored their parents.

^{viii} Included are the adjoining cities of Gurgaon and Noida, which form part of the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi.

^{ix} Notable exceptions included three respondents who visited India only two times prior to migration.

^x Waters (1990) notes that many immigrant groups consider values such as the importance of a close-knit family and excelling at school as unique to their group. Thus, she argues that these values are not exclusive to any single immigrant group.

^{xi} According to Sklair (1995:134), “The transnational capitalist classes do not identify with any foreign country in particular, or even necessarily with the First World, or the white world, or the Western world. They identify with the global capitalist system, reconceptualize their several national interests in terms of the global system, and take on the political project of reconceptualizing the national interests of their co-national in terms of the global capitalist system.”

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