

Transnational Networks and Practices of Overseas Indians in Germany

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Abstract

The number of non-resident Indians and People of Indian Origin living in Germany has doubled in the last 15 years. Against this background, the paper looks at the multiple cross-border linkages maintained by Indian migrants in Germany. The paper first portrays the development of Indo-German migration since 1950. The main section then describes what linkages are developed by Indian migrants living in Germany between their places of residence and their places of origin. Applying a transnational perspective, the paper portrays how Indian migrants are embedded in different transnational networks. Based on in-depth interviews typical practices are described and changes of these practices during the life course are discussed. Differences in the transnational practices of the first and of the second generation are also addressed. The findings show that all respondents actively link the places where they live with their places of origin and induce changes both “here” and “there”.

Keywords

Migration, transnationalism, networks, diaspora, India, Germany

Introduction

Different migration flows and systems in the last two centuries have resulted in the presence of Indian minorities in more than 200 countries (MOIA 2012). The differences in the migrant groups, their motives for migrating and the legal status they have make it difficult to talk about “the” Indian diaspora. Migration out of India has been largely shaped by the regulations of the receiving countries. Linkages between India and the different com-

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munities are quite diverse. Generally, the linkage to groups is less active in countries without recent immigration from India (Khadria 2014). Within “the Indian diaspora”, non-resident Indians (NRI) and People of Indian Origin (PIO)¹ living in Germany are a relatively small group. According to the German Microcensus 2014, there are 100,000 NRI and PIO living in Germany.² This paper will describe what transnational fields are relevant for the Overseas Indians living in Germany and what practices shape these fields. Emphasis will be given to how these practices change over the life course and how they differ between the first and the second generation migrants.

Linking with “the diaspora”

Since the 1980s, the Indian government has tried to establish linkages with Indian communities abroad. A high level committee developed the so-called diaspora strategy for the Indian government in 2001 (Singhvi 2001). This is based on a changed perception of overseas Indians, especially of the highly skilled emigrants (Khadria 2014: 30f.): until the 1980s they were regarded as “deserters” who fled India; then the perception shifted to “brain banks”, while since the opening of the Indian economy (and the search for foreign direct investments) they have been regarded as “angels”. The hope is that they will not only contribute to India’s development through investments but may eventually return and contribute personally. Main suggestions of the committee were to facilitate the integration of persons of Indian origin in the receiving countries, while at the same time strengthening the cultural and economic ties with India. Furthermore, the experts recommended easing investments from NRI and PIO and facilitating the (at least temporary) return of highly skilled personnel, especially in the education and the health sectors. The report was heavily criticised for three main reasons: 1) the strategy mainly addressed highly qualified migrants – leaving large sections of “the diaspora” unacknowledged (Dickinson / Bailey 2007), 2) “Indian culture” was equated with Hinduism, ignoring India’s cultural diversity (Mani / Varadarajan 2005; Ho 2011), and 3) the neo-colonial tone of the report’s rhetoric:

¹ NRI/PIO describe the legal status of persons according to Indian law. While NRI are persons holding Indian citizenship but living outside India, PIO do not hold Indian citizenship but have ancestors who did (up to the fourth generation, though excluding persons who have or had the citizenship of either Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan or Sri Lanka).

² Data was made available by DeStatis on request.

The Indian Diaspora spans the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. It is so widespread that the sun never sets on the Indian Diaspora (Singhvi 2001: v).

Based on the diaspora strategy, several measures were undertaken by the Indian government, among them the introduction of the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) scheme, offering a quasi-dual citizenship for PIO. It allows for visa-free traveling, working and investing in India with hardly any limitations. Further measures were the setting up of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs³ and the development of outreach activities like *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (PBD) – the day of non-resident Indians – which is celebrated as a high-level event annually on the 9th of January, the day Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa to India.

Phases of Indo-German migration

The roughly 100,000 Indians are a relatively small group among the persons with migration background in Germany.⁴ They have been described as hardly recognised and well integrated (Goel 2006a) – an assessment that today probably needs revision, as the number has increased and the duration of stay is relatively short (which may result in problems related to integration).

In the following paragraphs the four main phases of migration from India to Germany since 1950 will be characterised. In each of these phases different groups and different migration patterns dominated, forming different kinds of networks within Germany and with India.

From 1950 onwards, students started to come to Germany, to both the East and West. Those who came in this first phase usually came for education only, returning to India afterwards. However, a few stayed as highly skilled and well integrated immigrants (Gottschlich 2012). In West Germany, they were involved in the formation of the *Deutsch-Indische Gesellschaft* (DIG), an association promoting cultural exchange between the two countries. This association's definition of Indian culture is a broad and inclusive one, not limited to any specific region or religion. The DIG is presently still quite active, though its members are ageing and many of the local groups have difficulties relating to the migrants who are currently coming to Germany (various expert interviews 2014 and 2015).

³ The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was merged with the Ministry of External Affairs under the current government.

⁴ All in all there were 17.1 million persons with migration background in Germany in 2014, constituting 21 per cent of the total German population (DeStatis 2015a: 7).

The second phase was dominated by the immigration of young women, mainly from Kerala (while there were also still students coming). Because of shortages of qualified nurses in Western Germany in the 1960s, young untrained women were brought to and trained in Germany (Goel 2013).⁵ The Roman Catholic church was one important facilitator for this particular migration network. While in some states nurses had their working permits withdrawn in the 1970s, they were allowed to stay in others. Today, North Rhine-Westphalia in particular shows a spatial cluster of migrants from this specific phase. Those who decided to stay in Germany often married Indian spouses, who were not allowed to work in Germany for the first four years. Urmila Goel (2013) sees this situation, in which mainly the husbands were condemned to idleness (since they were not allowed to enter the labour market), as one reason for the active formation of Kerala associations (cultural groups, sports groups, etc.). Churches in which masses were celebrated according to Syro-Malabar or Syro-Orthodox rites became additional nuclei around which Kerala associations developed. Because of this very region-specific character, in many cases there were few interactions with Indian migrants from other regions (various expert interviews 2014 and 2015).

The third phase witnessed immigration mainly of Punjabis (Nijhawan 2006; Gottschlich 2012). In the 1970s and 1980s the Indian state of Punjab saw violent inner-state conflicts with the central government when the Khalistan movement strived for an independent state. During this period, migrants came to Germany and sought asylum. Even if asylum was granted in only a few cases, many found other ways of legally staying in Germany, e.g. through marriage or an “exceptional leave to remain” (German: *Duldung*; see Gottschlich 2012, Goel 2008). For this group, Sikh temples (Gurdwaras) emerged as nuclei for the formation of communities. These Gurdwaras were established partly by highly skilled migrants in the first and second phase, whereas new Gurdwaras were established by the Punjabi migrants in the third phase. Many of these migrants came from rural backgrounds, few were academics (interviews with experts and migrants 2015 and 2016). Therefore, many had to take up low-skilled occupations. Because of the hostile attitude of many of these Punjabi migrants towards the Indian nation state (one interviewee said he saw in one Gurdwara the slogan *Hindustan murdabad*, i.e., “Death to Hindustan” painted on the wall in the 1980s) and the socioeconomic differences, hardly any links were established between this community and other Indian migrants. Also within the Sikh community conflicts emerged between earlier (usually highly skilled)

⁵ Pierre Gottschlich estimates their numbers to “close to 6,000” (Gottschlich 2012: 2).

migrants and the asylum seekers (interviews with experts and migrants 2015 and 2016).

A completely new phase of Indo-German migration started in 2000. This current phase is characterised by a steep increase in the migration volume and the emergence of two new groups: highly skilled professionals, mainly from the IT sector, and students. In particular the involvement of Indian IT professionals in solving the Y2K bug⁶ all over the world at the end of the 1990s, resulted in increasing interest, especially in Europe, in attracting highly skilled Indian migrants (Khadria 2014). In Germany a Green Card programme was launched to stimulate the migration of IT professionals to Germany in 2000. Of all the immigration permits issued under this programme between 2000 and 2005, Indians had the largest share⁷ – though their number was lower than initially expected (Gottschlich 2012: 6).

This experience contributed to reforms of the German immigration policy in 2005 and 2008. Barriers for highly skilled migrants and students were lowered. Together with the increasing economic engagement of Indian companies in Germany and German companies in India and the internationalisation of the German economy and universities, these changes increased Germany's appeal for Indians seeking experience abroad. Nonetheless, other countries with a similar education and legal system (UK, USA, Canada, Australia) are regarded as more prestigious destinations for education.

The most recent legal change, easing the migration of highly skilled migrants, is the European Blue Card. It was introduced in 2012 and aims at attracting highly skilled migrants to the EU, giving them access to labour markets in several countries of the Union (Chanda / Mukherjee 2014; BAMF not dated).

In the fourth phase (starting in 2000 and continuing up to the present), increasing migration has led to a doubling of the number of NRI living in Germany (35,183 in 2000; 76,093 in 2014 according to DeStatis 2005, 2015). Furthermore the number of students has drastically increased: among the international students in Germany, Indians ranked fifth in the winter term 2014–15 with 11,860 registrations (3.7 per cent of all foreign students) (DeStatis 2015c: 386). The number of Indian nationals who started studying

⁶ The “Y2K bug” or “Year 2000 Problem” describes the problems which emerged from the fact that software written in the 20th century used only the last two digits for representing the year. It was thus feared that in the year 2000 (written as “00”) computers would assume the year was 1900. To solve the problem, wide ranging changes in software codes were needed. Indian IT-service providers were deeply involved in rewriting these software codes.

⁷ Indians numbered 3,926 (Kolb 2005: 2).

in Germany has constantly risen between 2000 (539 beginners) and 2013 (4,041 beginners) (BAMF 2015: 7). These numbers indicate that the transnational connections between India and Germany might become increasingly important.

The transnational perspective

Transnationalism developed as a new field of migration studies from the 1990s onwards. It focuses on aspects of migration which were hitherto under-theorised. According to Glick Schiller et al. (1992), globalisation processes led to the emergence of a new type of migrant: “Transmigrants” are positioned simultaneously in the receiving society as well as in the society of origin, connecting the two through multiple relations, namely familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Portes / Landolt 1999; Fassmann 2002). This results in a new quality of cross-border linkages (Goeke 2007), which challenge the basic assumptions of earlier theories on migration and integration. Such theories are usually based on the assumption that migrants either gradually integrate themselves more or less in the receiving society or shift back to their place of origin. Transnationalism, in contrast, describes migrants who are simultaneously embedded in two societies.

Reasons for an intensification of transnational phenomena are the increasing communication and travel opportunities and the parallel reduction of their costs. Living transnationally has become logistically easier and cheaper, the contacts migrants establish between the receiving society and their places of origin have become closer and more frequent (Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 2009). In particular instant communication via the internet and new social media has resulted in mutual enforcing of transnational social networks and globalisation processes. Consequently, transnational social networks are increasing in density and number (Pries 2010). The estrangement that occurred between migrants and their friends and relatives in the past, is decreasing (Vertovec 2009; Schmiz 2011), also because regular contact is expected and demanded by those who stayed behind, through formal rules (Mutersbaugh 2002) or social pressure (Vertovec 2009).

Transnational phenomena address different aspects of migration and social organisation. Steven Vertovec (2009) identified five main thematic clusters in the literature on transnationalism: social formations, socio-cultural transformations, political transformations, economic transformations and religious transformations. Despite this thematic breadth and the growing body of literature, transnationalism has not been dealt with exhaustively.

Research focused initially on transnational phenomena in the American migration system. And while the concept was developed through inductive reasoning based on these case studies, research on other migration systems, especially on emerging migration patterns such as Indo-German migration, contributes to the deepening of understanding of transnational phenomena. It reveals new practices and adds to further development of the transnational perspective.

Methods

The overall aim of the DFG-funded project THIMID⁸ is to understand how Indian migrants are embedded in transnational networks and what changes they bring about at the places of settlement and the places of origin. This paper presents findings from the project's first two phases. The aim of these phases was to understand the diversity of the Indian communities in Germany, reasons for migration, the embedding in transnational networks and the importance of transnational practices. The methods employed were participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with first generation and second generation migrants and with experts.

As a starting point for the empirical work, various Indian associations, institutions (religious orders, etc.) and online platforms were identified through an internet search. These were contacted and following this, gatherings of Indian associations and gatherings such as religious festivals or celebrations on occasions like the Indian Independence Day were visited. These visits provided information about the way Indian migrants interact with each other and how these associations are organised. Additionally, these gatherings offered an opportunity to recruit interview partners (other strategies were additionally applied to also include respondents who were not involved in these networks).

The sampling method used in the first phase was a theoretical sampling combined with snow ball sampling (using different "starting points"). Basically two types of interview partners were addressed in the semi-structured interviews, using two sets of guiding questions: respondents were either interviewed as experts (regarding Indian migration in general or the association they represented) or as actors (regarding their migration history, their transnational networks and practices). Experts were selected who could provide knowledge of the organisation of Indian migrants in Germany (like

⁸ THIMID = *Transnationales Handeln indischer Migranten in Deutschland* ("Transnational Practices of Indian Migrants in Germany"; DFG grant BU 2747/1-1).

chair persons of associations or staff from the Indian embassy and consulates) or were linked to institutions that facilitate transnational networks (such as the German academic exchange service, DAAD). In both cases the interviews were recorded, if permission was granted, and transcribed afterwards. In rare cases, consent was not given; then notes were taken during the interview and a protocol based on these notes was prepared directly after the interview. The languages used during the interviews were either English or German, according to the preference of the interviewees.

Regarding the actors, the sampling aimed at representing different groups (as described in the first section of this paper), while simultaneously reflecting different positions within these groups. In total 49 interviews were conducted in 2015, 46 of which were recorded fully and transcribed afterwards (11 expert interviews, 38 actor interviews; 22 were conducted in English, 27 in German). During the interviews with actors, the interviewees were asked to draw migration history charts (Carling 2012). These charts are a graphical representation of the migration history of the individual household members, similar to a network diagram. This method was applied at the beginning of the interviews and later on allowed the interviewer to inquire about the reasons for the migrations and for the networks maintained with former places of residence and family members currently living in other places.

After transcription, all the interviews were analysed using MaxQDA, applying a qualitative content analysis. The initial code-tree was developed on the basis of the main fields described in the transnationalism literature. During the analysis, the code-tree was developed further, and more detailed and emerging categories were added.

Empirical findings

The transnational networks and practices that emerged as relevant from the content analysis will be presented in the form of a thick description (Ryle 1971; Geertz 1973). The qualitative approach followed does not allow for a generalisation of results, but there are typical patterns which seem to appear (and which will be further investigated with a quantitative study in the project's third phase). Three types of networks emerged as having high relevance for the transnational practices of Indian migrants in Germany: 1) family networks, which were described by all interviewees as important and stable connections, 2) occupational networks and 3) religious networks. In the analysis five transnational practices emerged as being highly relevant: 1) sending remittances, 2) visiting "home", 3) communicating, 4) working

transnationally and 5) contributing to charities. In the following description typical patterns will be described, in an attempt to illustrate commonalities and differences between different groups within “the Indian diaspora” in Germany. Emphasis will also be laid on differences between the first and the second generation and on how transnational practices change during the life course.

Transnational Networks

Family is described as the most important link to India, and several respondents speak of the family in India as their roots. This aspect is exemplified in the following quote from Jyoti⁹ (migrated to Germany ten years ago because of her husband’s occupation as a senior manager in a large company):

The connection is family ... family and to some extent friends back home there. We spent a large part of our childhood there, so that is the connection ... so how you can say ... the roots.¹⁰

For males in the first generation in particular their traditional role in the family is of great importance. According to the traditional value system, the oldest son has to care for his parents and at the same time is involved in all relevant decisions. Fulfilling this role is at times troublesome, as Govind (migrated to Germany 14 years ago as an IT professional with a so-called Green Card) said, describing his duty to care for his mother:

It is a responsibility for me. I am the elder son. In the Indian culture, an elder son has to take care of the parents. So I always feel that I am responsible, even though my brother ... [break]. Myself is responsible. So whenever she [i.e. his mother] has a problem, I try to solve it through my own friends’ circles and try to facilitate such things. But many times I feel the age of my mum ... she’s aged now 70 and she needs her children more. I feel maybe we would have stayed together.¹¹

However, the role within the family was described as subject to change during the course of life. The involvement in decisions taken in India was described as declining over time, as was the amount of remittances sent. This is mainly related to changing constellations in India, e.g., when the parents die or when younger siblings or other dependants start their own household (for a discussion of the “remittance decay function” cf. Carling 2008).

⁹ All names have been altered for data protection reasons.

¹⁰ Interview by author, 3 May 2015.

¹¹ Interview by author, 23 October 2015.

Family networks are also described as being important by second generation migrants, especially for learning Indian languages, as well as for learning about the cultural background and values. First generation migrants want their children to spend time with the family in India in order to learn about their roots – a metaphor that was used by several interviewees. Second generation interviewees also actively seek connections to family in India. For example, one interviewee (the daughter of a couple from Kerala, whose mother migrated to Germany in 1968 to become a nurse) celebrated her marriage (with a German spouse) in India. She called this a present for the community in India, especially for her grandmothers. However, female respondents from the second generation also mentioned negative feelings about their embedding in transnational family networks. They described difficulties with the conservative values of their families in India which often did not match the realities of life in Germany. One interviewee almost completely cut off contact to her family, because she felt pressured by family members who did not accept her decision not to study medicine. Another said that she changed her habitus and clothing when she visited her relatives in India. In order to keep her lives separate, she did not link up with her family members via Facebook, so that they could not see pictures of her in Western clothes, e.g., with a plunging neckline.

What emerges from the interviews is that the embedding in family networks significantly differs between first and second generation migrants. The former are much more actively involved than the latter. A commonality, however, is that respondents – first and second generation – distinguished clearly between relatives in India and those living in other places. While close relationships are maintained with the former, the relationship to the latter is usually less intensive. Even if many have siblings in the UK or the USA, the common place of meeting is India and the networks are centred on the place of origin. Hardly any transnational cross-linkages within “the Indian diaspora” were mentioned except for sporadic visits of relatives living in nearby countries.

Occupational networks are important in several respects. Some first generation respondents found their way to Germany through these networks, when they were posted in Germany. Those working in transnational companies with the main office in India are deeply embedded in transnational life. Daily routines such as long working hours are part of this, since the employee is often required to be present during the office hours of the Indian headquarters and of the German customers. Furthermore, working in transnational teams also makes it necessary to commute regularly.

Several first generation respondents maintain occupational networks in Germany and India, using their transnational position for their business.

They work either independently as counsellors or journalists “explaining” India in German media and Germany in Indian media or run companies with branches in both countries. The different business cultures present challenges for this group, as Govind (see above) explained:

In my business, we are working with 30, 40 customers – regularly maybe four to five – but all these people, they don’t become friends. [...] In India it is not like that. I also associate with many CEOs in India, but we become friends. [...] So you develop a kind of ... you share a lot of personal things. But in Germany it is quite difficult. That is the way I still feel. Even though I do business and I am here for the last 15 years, I still feel as a little stranger to this country.¹²

Interestingly, several respondents from the second generation also utilise their transnational capital for their occupation – though in a different way. One respondent works as a lawyer and is specialised in counselling Indian companies planning to do business in Germany. Other respondents work as intercultural trainers. In both cases the focus of the business activities clearly lies in Germany, which marks an important intergenerational shift.

A different kind of occupational network is maintained by those involved in ethnic business, e.g., selling Indian products. A survey in the so-called “Indian quarter” in Cologne (Butsch 2015) revealed that those who trade in Indian food (especially spices and groceries) maintain links with wholesale traders in the UK, the Netherlands or the US, but not with the producers in India. The reason is that importing food from India is subject to difficult custom procedures. In contrast to this, traders who sell Indian clothes, cloth, furniture or decorative articles import their goods directly from India. Here members of the first and the second generation respondents maintain active networks with their Indian business partners (cf. Schmiz’ study on Vietnamese traders, 2011).

As to the question of how stable transnational occupational networks are over time, there is no definite answer. While some of these networks are quite stable, other respondents use these networks only temporarily or as a backup. Others strive hard to overcome their transnational work life since they experience it as a burden.

Religious networks make up the third type of network, emerging as important and transnational in structure. These networks are either initiated by religious institutions or emerge when interactions are centred around religious activities. They are mainly relevant for the first generation. One important actor in this regard is the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1960s and 1970s the migration of young women to be trained as nurses in Germany

¹² Interview by author, 23 October 2015.

was mainly channelled through this church. Today, Catholic priests are brought from India to Germany to take over parishes, given the declining number of German priests. For some orders, the “export” of priests thus has become an important source of income, since the priests’ salaries are usually transferred to India. The Indian order of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) currently has 23 priests in the archdiocese Cologne and 130 in Germany as a whole, according to one respondent. He said that he was proud to be able to support charitable activities in India through his work in Germany.¹³

The “export” of priests has also been described by interview partners from other communities. In Sikh Gurdwaras, for example, priests from India are hired to stay for a certain period of time in Germany to perform the rites. Some of them come directly from India, mainly Punjab, some come from other Gurdwaras in Europe, but all of them have been trained in India. One Bengali community also regularly hires priests from India for their annual Durga Puja ceremony. Another interesting case is that of the Shri Ganesha Hindu temple, which is currently being built in Berlin. The architect and the craftsmen regularly come from South India to work on the temple, with some building materials and of course the idols purchased in India.

Regarding the religious networks, an interesting development can be observed: members of the first generation seem to engage in these networks more when they get children, saying that they want their children to learn about their ancestors’ religion. The comparison between the first and the second generation shows that there are clear differences, with these networks being much more relevant for the first generation.

Transnational practices

Among the strongest expressions of connection and sense of belonging is the practice of sending remittances. It enforces the bonds within a social network (Portes 1996). Respondents send money either to support parents or for the education of younger siblings or nieces/nephews. In rare cases the continuous support of siblings was described, e.g., of a widowed sister. Three patterns emerged from the interviews: 1) Above all among the migrants from the second phase many migrated in order to be able to find well-paid work in Germany and support families back home. Here, sending remittances was the main reason for migrating. 2) Others regularly support parents and family members as they would have done in India. 3) Mainly the young and middle-aged highly skilled migrants described their families as

¹³ Interview by author, 8 July 2015.

wealthy and not in need of remittances. They mainly send money to India for their personal savings.

Second generation interviewees did not report regular support of family members in India. While some took their parents' support of family members in India for granted, one described it as a reason for conflict in her parents' marriage (her mother of German origin did not understand why her father sent so much money to India). One respondent (her parents are both of Indian origin, but she grew up mostly in Germany) also described her difficulties understanding who her father gave money to and for what reasons. When she visited India with her father, people she didn't know knocked on their door and her father gave them money for reasons she did not understand. She asked her father to explain this to her so that she would know what to do on her own visits to India in the future. She felt confused, because she could not afford to give money to "all the people" (as she said in German) and did not understand who was eligible to ask for money.¹⁴ This example shows that the second generation lacks the understanding and the strong ties (Granovetter 1973) which are a prerequisite of remitting money.

Another practice is visiting "home" as such visits strengthen the bonds of Indian migrants with their networks in India. First generation interviewees often described this as "coming home" citing familiar smells, a different kind of life rhythm, etc. Many try to visit India regularly with the whole family, preferably at least once every year. However, several respondents explicitly said that these "holidays" have no recreational value for them – rather the opposite. The character of visits home changes in the first generation during the life course. While some older migrants after retirement started spending a considerable time of the year in India, others stopped visiting India – for health reasons or because all those they were close to, had died.

For the second generation respondents these visits "home" are important to learn about their origin but some also described feelings of estrangement. One respondent said she enjoyed being among people who look like her, while at the same time feeling insecure about habits, customs and language. Another difference between first and the second generation respondents is that for the former "visiting India" usually means visiting the place of origin, while the latter are interested in travelling within India, too.

Communicative practices are also of high relevance. Besides telecommunication services like phone, Skype, Facetime, WhatsApp calls, etc., other ways of staying in touch with friends and relatives in India are WhatsApp

¹⁴ Interview by author, 4 March 2015.

(text and visual) messages and Facebook. WhatsApp especially was mentioned by respondents as an important way of linking up with friends and family. However, different communication patterns emerged among the respondents. For one group, communicating with people in India is a part of their daily life. A typical case in this group is Priya (first generation, came to Germany 15 years ago because of her husband's job in IT). Although she has friends in Germany and is very active in an Indian association, she maintains very close ties with her family in India:

Initially when we came, we had to go to a phone booth and call India. It was a great thing when we got the calling cards. It was like amazing, I could talk to India from home. Then came Skype. But now it is like there is no difference between India and here, because I am seeing my sister every day. I talk to my mother; we talk to my in-laws. We are seeing them. The lines are very like almost gone. There is no difference for me anymore.¹⁵

This quotation also highlights the fact that the means of communication has fundamentally changed in the last fifteen years (for a review cf. Vertovec 2009: 56 who calls the cheap real-time communication the "social glue" of transnational communities).

However, interestingly enough, not all respondents think that this has actually influenced their communication behaviour. While some, like Priya, feel much closer to their friends and family members in India, others say that the reduction in the cost for and the increased access to communication has not changed their communication behaviour significantly. They said that earlier the cost was not a limitation for them either, though admitting that communication has become easier. Others said communication has even become less intensive and more superficial with the new media. They have stopped writing letters, which they found to be a very intense form of communication. The instant communication and sharing of visual impressions provided by SMS, WhatsApp etc. cannot replace the intimacy of the "old" media.

One respondent said that she experienced communication with people on the phone as unsatisfying, because people did not listen or were distracted by other things. For her, this type of communication cannot replace personal interactions, which are needed to fill a relationship with life.¹⁶

Two second generation respondents said that they felt pressured to regularly participate in communication. Nandita (second generation, mother and father of Indian origin, grew up in Germany) for example said that

¹⁵ Interview by author, 3 May 2015.

¹⁶ Interview by author, 24 April 2015.

relatives from India urge her to respond more quickly and more often to Facebook posts. A comparison of the interviews of the second and the first generation reveals that communication seems to be much more intense for first generation migrants. When it comes to family matters, communication for the second generation is often indirect and takes place through the parents, who generally maintain contact with the family in India.

Transnational practices are also part of the daily professional lives of many first and second generation migrants. Several respondents work for transnational (usually Indian) companies that have temporarily posted them in Germany. For some respondents who have been in Germany for a long period, this was the entry gate to the country. Abhay (first generation, senior manager in an Indian company, in Germany for 15 years) said that he finds transnational work life exhausting: working in two time zones means long working hours, since he has to participate in meetings via Skype in India relatively early according to German time. Additionally, he has to travel frequently to the company headquarters in India.¹⁷

A second group uses their transnational identities or positions and networks as capital for business. Several respondents work as consultants for German companies investing in India or Indian companies investing in Germany. Anand (first generation, came to Germany to work in media ten years ago, now self-employed) spoke about his future plans in this direction:

I am in the process of floating a business platform where I will be helping the German and Indian companies to come together and it is very much “the homework is done” and it is on the last stage of floating the company. My business idea is [...] I have named it PPTT: That’s Partnership, Project, Training and Travel.¹⁸

Anand’s idea is to aim especially at small and medium-sized enterprises from Germany. He offers to look for suitable partners in India for them, helps initiate partnerships and organises delegation journeys. Part of his strategy is also to develop small projects together with both partners in which he attempts to bridge cultural differences in project management in order to facilitate long-term cooperation.

A similar strategy is followed by Sandip (second generation, self-employed lawyer, grew up in Germany), who provides legal advice for Indian companies that are investing in Germany. He said that his Indian origin is part of his business capital: he can quickly switch to Hindi if things need to be discussed informally and he has a better understanding of what Indian

¹⁷ Interview by author, 23 October 2015.

¹⁸ Interview by author, 2 June 2015.

companies might actually be looking for when they partner with German companies. At the same time, he is well-versed regarding the needs of German companies. Thus he feels he can be an honest agent for both sides. In similar ways, other interviewees also use their position in both societies to become a kind of bridge or matchmaker in their work life, as scientists or journalists, for example. One difference emerging in this field between the first and the second generation is that second generation migrants focus their activity much more on Germany.

Through transnational networks, some respondents also facilitate outsourcing processes. Milap (first generation, 15 years in Germany, engineer, owner of a medium-sized enterprise) actually wanted his company to be “German” but expectations from his business partners were different:

Why do the people give me business? Because I am an Indian, an educated Indian, an engineer, who can do something in Germany with Indian people. That is the only concept. [...] actually speaking I started a German company first. [...] I never had any branch anywhere in the world. I said, I want to be a local German company. [...] but] the customers are looking at me as an Indian guy. [...] So they started giving me business and they put pressure on me to start in India. And that was also the demand. So I started an Indian branch of my company and then started working to work together with India and then it picked up.¹⁹

Milap’s example is an interesting one, as it challenges the idea of transnational migrants as self-confident actors being able to actively make use of their many resources. Instead others (e.g. business partners) demand transnational practices or behaviour according to stereotypes. Another example, pointing in the same direction, is a Sikh retailer. He opened a shop for Indian food, after he and his siblings had difficulties finding jobs, which he thinks was because of discrimination. He and his male family members are dressed according to Sikh tradition (turban, beard), which he felt made it difficult to be hired as a salesman.²⁰

One last field of transnational practices to be discussed here is that of charitable activities. In the interviews, four areas of charitable engagement were described, namely education, caring for children/orphans, health care and religion. Great value is placed on education in Indian society, and it is seen as a way of empowering the beneficiaries. Some respondents support schools, others support individual students (fees, books, uniforms, etc.), whereby caring for children is closely related to this. Some migrants sponsor individual children to ensure they have a minimum standard of living. One

¹⁹ Interview by author, 23 October 2015.

²⁰ Interview by author, 10 June 2014; cf. Nijhawan 2006.

Indo-German couple runs a NGO that operates several “children villages” – institutions in which around twenty orphans live together.

Religious institutions are supported, either because of a personal relationship or because the respondent wanted to do a good deed. One interviewee (second generation, grew up in Germany) told me that he regularly sends money to the school of a Guru he attended himself for one year. Another one (first generation, resident in Germany for almost 40 years) regularly pays for improvements of the temple next to his parents’ house in India.

The interview partners gave several different motives for their charitable engagement. Three first generation respondents said that according to the values they learned from their parents, charitable engagement is a duty of people who are better-off. One respondent said that his family benefited from an NGO earlier and he now feels that he has to give something back, not only to this specific NGO but also to society. Similarly Anish (first generation, physicist, in Germany for 40 years) gave as his reason:

Support for the country ... doing something good. I got away from there and somehow I have to give something back.²¹

Others see their engagement to empower poor people as an investment in India’s future; they would like to promote education; or they felt personally affected by the poverty in India. One respondent, who works for an NGO in India whenever she is there for a longer period of time, told me that besides being able to contribute to India’s development, she also hopes to find a job in India through this engagement.

While several respondents like Anish said that their engagement is motivated through their emotional ties with India, others said that it is just by chance that they are engaged in India. Vishal (first generation, medical doctor, in Germany for 50 years) said, that his knowledge of the situation in his hometown allows him to provide help efficiently to people and institutions in need. Interestingly, he is also a kind of funding “matchmaker”: Through his engagement he also attracts funds from other sources – more than he is himself able to donate. One of the projects Vishal supports is the neonatal intensive care unit of the district hospital in his hometown. He has invested several thousand euros himself but was able to attract more than 100,000 euros from a German foundation.²² Others also described themselves as matchmakers through their charitable engagement. One couple said

²¹ “Unterstützung des Landes ... was Gutes zu tun. Ich bin weggekommen und irgendwie muss ich etwas zurückgeben.” Interview and translation from German by author, 20 May 2015.

²² Interview by author, 10 July 2015.

that they know about the problems in India and how to solve them, while people in Germany have the money and are willing to donate.

Charitable activities in India were also regarded critically by some respondents. Anish, for example, has been supporting a hospital for several years but now wants to withdraw from the project because the friend with whom he developed the project, a medical doctor, has died. He feels that he cannot continue the project on his own. At this stage, he doubts the sustainability of his engagement.²³

Two respondents from the second generation critically questioned their parent's engagement. One said her father's motivation was simply profiling. The other one was critical about her father's engagement since he obtained money for his projects from a Christian NGO and she felt that this NGO utilised the project to evangelise the beneficiaries. The second generation respondents were only partly involved in charitable activities in India, mainly in projects started by their families earlier. Here the bonds seem to be weaker in the second generation. From a life course perspective, there seems to be an increase of charitable activities within the first generation. This could be explained by two factors: First, the financial resources often increase with growing age; second, as close family members might need less money (decreasing remittances) more money becomes available for charitable activities.

Discussion

The transnational practices of NRI/PIO in Germany as described by the interviewees show distinct patterns: aspects which were mentioned as relevant in other transnational communities seem to be of minor importance for the Overseas Indians in Germany. For example, engagement in political processes or structures, which is of high relevance in some transnational communities (e.g. Haitians living in the US, Itzigsohn 2000), was hardly mentioned in the interviews. One interviewee is personally actively engaged in Indian politics, but currently there seem to be hardly any structures, e.g., to raise funds for particular parties. A possible explanation for this could be that the number of Overseas Indians is still relatively low. Further, experts said that NRI are not relevant as target groups for parties, because voting abroad is not possible. In other fields there were likewise differences in comparison to the characteristics mentioned in the existing body of literature on transnationalism. For example, there are no hometown associations such

²³ Interview by author, 20 March 2015.

as described in the international context (Faist 2008) and in Germany, e.g. Turkish migrants (Caglar 2006). Indian migrants engage in charitable activities in India in a more individualized manner, usually through individual connections or family networks.

An important finding that emerged was that the dynamics of transnational relationships and practices altered over time, with significant differences between the first and the second generation. Sean R. Lauer and Queenie Wong (2010) suggested applying a life course perspective to analyse changes in transnational practices. Some patterns in the empirical findings match this concept well. One example is the increasing duration of stays in India after retirement. Also the decision to stay in one place for a longer period of time is often linked to parenthood or the children's schooling. Because migrants remain deeply embedded in family support networks, the death of parents in India is also one important life course event, which changes transnational practices. These are cases in which transnational practices do not increase but also can decline. Other reasons given for this decline were the loss of contact with friends, the lack of common interests, different life realities, the death of close relatives or changes in dependencies of relatives. However, the decline was also described by some as temporary. What emerges from the interviews is that the transnational networks are subject to change: the roles and relations within families are re-negotiated when life-situations change. Even more dynamic is the situation in work relations in the globalising economy. In particular respondents in higher positions in private enterprises have to show great flexibility and change their jobs frequently.

The project's empirical findings also shed some light on the question as to how far second generation migrants' transnational practices differ from those of the first generation (Levitt / Waters 2002). Main distinctions can be seen in the degree of involvement in family networks and the role taken within these networks (remittances, responsibility for family members). Charitable engagement, though, was also indicated by second generation NRI/PIO. However for this generation, cultural, religious and business aspects of transnational life seem to be of most relevance. This was usually explained as significant for a sense of belonging. Second generation migrants also use transnational networks or their skills as cultural translators for their professional life. Transnational friendship networks seem to be important for the first generation (mainly for those who migrated a relatively short time before), but are negligible for the second generation.

Conclusion

Compared to descriptions of dominant patterns outlined in the literature on transnationalism, this study reveals some differences and some new aspects. The links Indian migrants in Germany maintain to their places of origin are very vibrant. Family is the most important anchor in India, for both migrants of the first and of the second generation. Additionally, respondents are embedded in occupational and religious networks. Other aspects described in the literature on transnationalism, such as political engagement, seem here to be of minor importance. Also the way in which charitable engagement is organised differs from findings in other case studies. This points to the fact that transnational practices differ significantly in different contexts. More, and more detailed, case studies are needed to understand what factors influence transnational practices.

The empirical data illustrates that transnational networks are not necessarily stable and that transnational practices are subject to change. This is related to life course events of the transnational actors (parenthood, retirement etc.), changes within the social transformations in which they are embedded (death of family members, changing financial dependencies of family members etc.) and external developments (technological advancements, changing costs of transportation and communication etc.). Furthermore, significant differences between the transnationalism of the first and the second generation emerge. The first generation is much more actively involved in processes and decisions in India, while the transnationalism of the second generation migrants is much more related to the construction of their own identity, although members of this generation also actively seek the role of intercultural translators (which is also partly reflected in their occupations). Nevertheless, their transnational practices seem to depend on the activities of the first generation; thus they often rely on the family networks and contacts set up by their parents and do not build their own networks. It can therefore be concluded that the second generation's transnationalism has a different quality and could be described as a much narrower dependent transnationalism, mainly focused on family networks and occupational networks.

Finally, this paper raises questions about the scope of the concept of transnationalism. Should research focus on transmigrants themselves or on transnational practices? In this study, only a few respondents stated that they actually physically changed their whereabouts regularly. However, all respondents actively link places and induce changes "here" and "there". In India, some of these mainly affect the migrants' strong family ties but especially those migrants engaged in charitable activities also induce changes at the re-

gional level. In Germany, transnational practices mainly result in a contribution to cultural diversity, knowledge about Indian culture and religion and increasing business relations. In particular changes in communication, the increase in economic relations and state policies (Indian diaspora strategy, Germany's immigration policy and opening of the education sector) have led to an increase of migration and transnational bonds. It will be interesting to see how this migration network develops in the future and how stable these new bridges are. With a multiscale analysis, transnationalism research can contribute to understanding how structures, actors and their practices change the places they connect.

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