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‘But why did you come back in the first place?’

**Return Migration to India: Narratives of Longing and
Belonging, ‘Home’ and Identity**

Mini Chandran Kurian

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh
August 2022**

Abstract

Migration flows have not always been unidirectional, yet the phenomenon of return migration has received inadequate attention in sociological literature, and the return migration of the Indian diaspora even less so. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by examining the lived experiences of highly skilled migrant professionals returning to India and unpacking their narratives to reflect on the many ways migrants construct identity, and a sense of self within the context of resettlement. Adopting a qualitative approach, it analyses the narratives of 24 returnees living in gated communities in the city of Bangalore and explores the ways in which notions of 'home' and 'belonging' are experienced at the intersection of mobility and identity. Mindful that migration literature on India is largely built around its status as one of the top 3 sending countries in the world (MPI, 2006), it shifts the research focus from India as a sending country to India as a receiving one, from *migration*, to the *return migration* of the highly skilled Indian diaspora.

The research draws on the literature on transnationalism to decode how transmigrants nurse multiple allegiances transcending borders, resulting in conflicted subjectivities. It applies the concept of 'simultaneity' to probe the returnees' sense of dual belonging, self-reflexivity, and need for cultural reproduction in the receiving society. Their narratives provide insights into the ways in which they reconcile their self-perceived identities – both existing and developing identities, that simultaneously straddle the 'Indian' and the 'global'. The thesis also interrogates the reified portrayal of the passive 'trailing spouse' in migration literature. It finds that while gender ideology continues to inform migration decisions, what has remained largely invisible is the agentic and partnering role of the female spouse at every stage of the migration process.

This study also considers how gated communities simultaneously exhibit systems of exclusion and segregation on the one hand, and social integration on the other, and investigates the ways in which a gated community becomes a spatial expression of identity construction. Living in exclusive gated communities or 'islands of privilege', returnees seem to occupy spaces of in-betweenness, hovering between immersion in, and withdrawal from the world outside their gates. Although it is to the home society that these migrants return, the path of resettlement

remains uncertain. The ability of returnees to adapt to their environment, the treatment accorded to them by family and community, and their capacity to find the golden mean between expectation and actuality, can greatly influence the possibility of permanent settlement in the home society. This study therefore seeks to tease out the interconnecting threads between return migration, expectation fulfilment, and circular migration.

Overall, the research aims to make four contributions to the sociology of migration. Firstly, it is one of the few studies on elite return migration to the Global South. It widens the geographical and epistemic boundaries of migration literature by exploring the dilemmas and mixed emotions of an understudied population of transnational migrant professionals. Secondly, the research calls for a reconceptualization of the term 'trailing spouse', thus marking a shift away from a discourse that devalues the non-wage labour of the female 'trailing spouse'. Thirdly, the evidence from this study strengthens the idea that the success of the return migration project depends greatly on not just the migrant's level of social and economic integration, but on the quality of the reception given to the returnee by the home society and extended family. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that adaptation to the home society and permanent resettlement will be a natural outcome of return migration.

Fourthly, the analysis contributes to the typology of return migration by conceptualising a state of being that can be termed 'liminal return'. Set in the critical space between return and remigration, 'liminal return' embodies the inherent ambivalence of the returnee who must balance mobility with immobility, a desire to move with the longing to stay. It thereby problematizes, and seeks to transcend, epistemological and ontological binaries in studies of migration and mobility.



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Lay Summary of Thesis

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Degree sought:	PhD in Sociology	No. of words in the main text of thesis:	90,327
Title of thesis:	‘But why did you come back in the first place?’ Return Migration to India: Narratives of Longing and Belonging, ‘Home’ and Identity		

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Lay Summary:

Migration flows have not always been unidirectional, yet the phenomenon of return migration has received inadequate attention in sociological literature, the return migration of the Indian diaspora even less so. My thesis attempts to address this gap in the literature and shifts the research focus from India as one of the top 3 sending countries in the world, to India as a receiving country - from ‘brain drain’ to ‘brain gain’. It examines the lived experiences of 24 highly skilled migrant professionals who have returned to India and live in gated communities in the city of Bangalore. It unpacks their narratives to reflect on the many ways migrants construct identity, and a sense of self within the context of resettlement. It also examines the ways in which notions of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are experienced at the intersection of mobility and identity.

While the research engages with the immigrants’ need for cultural reproduction in the receiving society, and the ways in which they nurture social and familial networks across borders, the research objectives in this study are centred on eliciting returnees’ aspirations, attitudes, and motivations, in both migration and return migration contexts. Accordingly, the research adopts a

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transnational lens, and probes the returnees' sense of dual belonging to both receiving and home societies. Adopting qualitative research methods, it probes the push-pull factors that impact the Indian migrant's decision to return to India, and elicits self-reflexive accounts of the actual day-to-day experiences of resettlement that could provide rich insights into the challenges and rewards of return migration. This includes details of social networks, interaction with extended family members and community, housing and schooling, employment and work satisfaction, service providers and gatekeepers, and cultural participation. How do returnees resettle in India, navigate existing social and cultural norms, and gendered expectations? What are the experiences of the female 'trailing spouses' in this study?

After returning to India, most highly skilled returnees choose to live in exclusive gated communities that are sometimes perceived as 'islands of privilege', where they appear to occupy spaces of in-betweenness, hovering between immersion and withdrawal from the world outside their gates. This study considers how gated communities simultaneously exhibit systems of exclusion and segregation on the one hand, and social integration on the other, and how inmates of a gated community forge bonds of solidarity and identity.

Although it is to the home society that these migrants return, processes of resettlement could be challenging. Much depends on the ability of returnees to adapt to their environment, and their ways of reacting to the treatment accorded to them by family and community. What expectations did they have about their 'homeland'? What does return translate into, for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? How does the behaviour of the home society influence the process of resettlement? Acknowledging that the returnees' capacity to find the golden mean between expectation and actuality can greatly influence the possibility of permanent settlement in the home society, this study examines the interconnecting threads between return migration, expectation fulfilment, and circular migration.

Overall, this research aims to make four chief contributions to the sociology of migration. Firstly, it focuses on the under-researched subject of return migration, and specifically on the little-known area of return migration to India. Secondly, it is one of the few studies on elite return migrants from the Global South that calls for a reconceptualizing of the term 'trailing spouse', thus marking a shift away from a discourse that devalues the non-wage labour of the female 'trailing spouse'.

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Thirdly, the evidence from this study strengthens the idea that the success of the return migration project depends greatly on not just the migrant's level of social and economic integration, but on the quality of the reception given to the returnee by the home society and extended family. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that adaptation to the home society and permanent resettlement will be a natural outcome of return migration. Fourthly, it contributes to the typology of return migration by conceptualising a state of being that can be termed 'liminal return'. Set in the critical space between return and remigration, it embodies the inherent ambivalence of the returnee who must balance mobility with immobility, a desire to move with the longing to stay.

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Declaration of Original Work

I hereby confirm that I have composed this thesis, and that this thesis is all my own work. I also declare that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

MINI CHANDRAN KURIAN

University of Edinburgh, August 30th, 2022

Acknowledgements

It is hard not to be emotional at the end of a five-year journey. From early fumbblings to finding clear trails to follow, to waking up to the discovery that my work has found its voice, it has been an extended period of learning and discovery, and lessons learnt. I would like to express my eternal gratitude to those who made this possible.

I have always disliked the term ‘supervisor’ - it seems to connote a rather rigid position of authority responsible for monitoring another’s performance or progress; it does little justice to the wealth of knowledge and caring support that these very special people offer a student swinging between fervour and self-doubt, despair and elation.

I would much rather use the term ‘mentor’. I owe my thesis to the generous and warm-hearted guidance of my mentors Professor Nasar Meer, Dr Radhika Govinda and Professor Lynn Jamieson. Their own brilliant work, their deep knowledge of the field, and their great ability to provide context and perspective to my subject of study helped me pull the threads of this research together and refine my ideas. My deepest gratitude to them for their insightful suggestions and corrections, for the handholding through difficult patches, and the firm yet kind steering that they offered. I can never forget our animated conversations, the passionate discussion of ideas, the feeling always, of having emerged into a patch of sunlight, every time we met. Thank you for helping me explore this extraordinary subject of return migration in all its many facets. Thank you for believing in me. I will greatly miss our little circle of warmth.

I dedicate this thesis to my father, whose insatiable love for knowledge is like a flame that never dims, whose love of the written word is like the roar of the sea, surging unbounded. I know that this thesis means as much to you, Daddy, as it does to me. In this, we are one.

To my mother whose inner grace and radiance lights up all our lives, whose protective love has been my refuge always, and to my mother-in-law whose constant support and lively interest in everything I do, I value so much.

To Alby, the love of my life. The enchanted, the arduous, the certain and the uncertain; anxiety, delight, and hope - we have walked down all these paths together. Thank you for being such an incredible partner, a rock of support, especially during this last stage of the PhD. Thank you for your great capacity to make our family feel loved and happy, for your ability to bring joy to every group you are in, your infinite courage, and for patiently letting me ramble on about migration at all hours!

To my children Pranoy and Nomisha who are the centre of my existence, my greatest happiness. I am so very proud of both of you and thank you for all that you teach me. Pranoy, thank you for being so strong for me, for your love, your absolute belief in me always. Thank you for your sparkling mind, for keeping a window open to the universe. For showing me possibilities. Nomisha, my guardian angel, your intellect and your extraordinary selflessness fill me with awe. Thank you for your gentle sweetness, your endless encouragement and hours of emotional support, your brilliant, thoughtful contributions to my work.

A special note of appreciation for you, the participants in my research, who so generously shared your journeys with me - your lived experiences and acts of meaning-making in strange new countries. In a sense, I travelled back and forth across continents with you, saw India through your eyes, experienced the same mixed emotions, the sense of dual belonging, of not belonging, of belonging more than ever... Your quest for identity, your notions of 'home'.

There is something about the story of return that transcends the mere recording of passage to become notations and verse of affect. I am grateful for the opportunity to both read and write the tale.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Storying Settlement

Remembered Spaces

“It was always in our hearts and minds. The longing for our country... our parents. And besides, the monotony of Western culture weighed me down. I felt like I was on autopilot, we were missing something. How do I say? That sense of contentment that we always had when we visited India. So, there was a longing to experience it even more. The way the clock works for most immigrants to the US is like this – the first 3 years of the first ten years it’s about *‘let me settle down’*. Then *‘let me get a house’*, then you have kids. In the 10th or 11th year, you begin having an introspective look back at your life – Then it’s *‘what now?’* I have seen so many people in this position. After around 12 years you begin to have that itch - *‘what if I go back?’* In our generation this is common - there is no fear of going back to our homeland, whereas in my uncle’s generation, there was no looking back, there was the fear of return - India is a third world country, there is no point in going back. But to my generation and to the generation 5 or 10 years younger than me, India is possible... especially with the opportunities that weren’t there before. So, it’s not like, oh my God, it’s a huge step down if we go back to India. At least we are returning to our roots”.

- Nagesh Alluri, Eagle Ridge, Bangalore

“Somehow, it was me who kept on reminding my family that we wanted to go back... though my husband also wanted to, in his heart. We would tell the children repeatedly that we belong to India. And you know how Indian parents also keep reminding you - *‘Don’t forget, you belong to India!’* We have that belief *na* – that the eldest one in the family will do the last rites, the ceremonies. And being the eldest, my husband was always told – *‘what if I die? will you be able to come back?’* So that was always there, that pressure point. Besides, there was always a fear that our children would start following another country’s culture, their values, their lifestyle... I wanted them to experience Indian culture in the original setting, like we had when we were growing up. We were always thinking, how long can we push it in Australia? When do we go back? Every year we’d visit India, even if it was expensive to make that trip. We would keep telling our friends, even visitors - *‘we are going back to India, we are going home!’*” We kept watering the roots of the idea of return.

- Lata Gollamudi, Seegehalli, Bangalore.

A quality of longing runs through these candid narratives like a skein of remembrance. A desire to retrieve remembered spaces, to go back in time and slip on old selves. Through the many years spent as highly skilled migrants in the receiving society, the participants in this study

continued to harbour an ideal of 'home'. Their accounts reveal the intensity of the dream of 'return'; a suggestion that they continued to regard their ancestral home as 'authentic', and as a place of eventual return (King & Christou, 2010). These concepts hold significance for understanding how the migrant 'manages negotiations of belonging over time, and over space' (Carling et al, 2015, p.19).

Rationale for Research

Despite the growing acknowledgement that migration flows have not always been unidirectional (Kunuroglu et al, 2016), and the recent spurt in empirical studies on return migration notwithstanding, return migration continues to be a largely unsung presence in mainstream migration studies literature (King and Kuschminder, 2022). Furthermore, return migration to India has been accorded very little attention (Debnath, 2016; Tejada, Khadria and Kuptsch, 2014).

Addressing this gap in social science literature, my thesis is situated within the aftermath of return migration to the homeland when the 'myth of return' (Anwar, 1979), is transformed from chimera to reality. It examines the lived experiences of highly skilled migrant professionals returning to India and unpacks their narratives to reflect on the many ways migrants construct identity, and a sense of self within the context of resettlement. It also explores the ways in which notions of 'home' and 'belonging' are experienced at the intersection of mobility and identity. Mindful that migration literature on India is largely built around its status as one of the top 3 sending countries in the world (MPI, 2006), it shifts the research focus from India as a sending country to India as a receiving one, from *migration*, to the *return migration* of the highly skilled Indian diaspora.

Importantly, there is a critical aspect of the resettlement process, a state of being that I conceptualise as 'liminal return', which embodies the inherent ambivalence of the returnee who must balance mobility with immobility, a desire to move with the longing to stay. There is a giving in, and a holding back, which reflects their inner conflict. This critical period in between return migration and remigration is a liminal intangible space that is barely acknowledged in sociological literature, and it represents a very significant gap in knowledge about migration processes. My study is situated within this stage of migration and focuses on this lacuna in the literature. This is the period of self-reflexivity, wherein returnees ponder over questions of self-

identity, and belonging, and assess the quality of their lives in the context of return. Their experiences of resettlement exert a major influence on their decisions to remain in the home country, or to leave once again.

This thesis therefore sets out to examine the dilemmas of transnational migrant professionals who seem to navigate this stage of return migration with mixed emotions - satisfaction that their dream of returning to the home society has been realised, but also a degree of dissatisfaction with the welcome accorded to them by their family or community, and a sense of being let down by the social and cultural constraints of a society that is at once familiar and new.

Furthermore, by interrogating the nuances of migration of relatively affluent individuals from developed countries in the Global North to less economically developed countries in the Global South, this thesis also contributes to the literature on 'privileged' or 'elite' migration.

Characterised as highly skilled knowledge workers, holding both global work experience and ample social and economic capital, these migrants can be said to embody 'privileged mobility' (Vered, 2011; Croucher, 2012). Here I interpret the term 'privileged' as representing migrants privileged by citizenship, class, or 'race' (Kunz, 2016). Deeply embedded in a 'global network of economic, political, social and cultural transnational linkage' (D'Mello & Eriksen, 2010, p.82), the returnees in this study construct and negotiate identities across boundaries, and within them. Once back in the home country, they transfer to it institutional and technical knowledge, and techniques, and introduce changes in their workplaces, building on their innovative experiences acquired abroad (Debnath, 2016; Ammassari, 2004). It must be noted that it is only in recent years that 'privileged' migration has garnered interest in migration studies, especially cases originating in the Global North (Fechter and Walsh, 2010; Leonard, 2010); previously, the research focus has been on migrants both skilled and unskilled, moving for solely for financial gain, from poorer under-developed countries to developed ones (Kunz, 2016). Perhaps because migrants privileged by either class or citizenship are assumed to be 'adaptable and acceptable cosmopolites, who are positive drivers of cross-border transfers of knowledge and skills' (Kunz, 2016, p.89), they have largely been given the go-by in mainstream migration literature.

Although it is to the home society that these migrants return, the path of resettlement does not promise to be easy or straightforward (Hammond, 1999; Koser and Black, 1999; Rogge, 1994). Return is not merely about going back home and fitting back into one's old life; re-settlement is a

process, not a definite outcome (Kuschminder, 2013). Additionally, transnational practices continue to inform return migration (Eastmond, 2006), rendering it layered and multi-faceted (Stefansson, 2006). Thus, it would be erroneous to assume that return and readjustment to the home society will be problem-free simply because returnees are highly skilled, hyper-mobile professionals with a high degree of socio-cultural and economic capital (Föbker et al., 2014). Though returnees are often perceived as ‘invisible migrants’ who just blend back into their home-country societies (Szkudlarek, 2010), the reality could be quite different.

As one of the participants in my study, Saroja Erraguntla, points out, *“It doesn’t become easier simply because you know what your homeland is like. We came back with open eyes, neither of us were blind to the realities of the return project, but it was still hard.”* Saroja lived in the US for 16 years, and held a senior position at INTEL, before choosing to return to India in 2004. *“We knew that daily life would be much simpler in the US. But we thought, here in India, we have friends, family, culture, the feel-good things...though the day-to-day hassle factor in India is high. Living in a gated community - some people call it a bubble - but it has made it easier for us to return here.”*

Migrants may return with the expectation that fitting in will be easy, into a place and society they expect to be familiar, that relationships have remained unchanged by time (Ahmed, 1999). When those expectations are unfulfilled, disappointment could set in, leading to emotional stress (Pocock and McIntosh, 2011) and a sour homecoming. The notion of ‘homecoming’ features in several research papers on return migration (Pauli, 2021; Tsuda, 2013; Markowitz, 2012) - the term could be said to have welcoming connotations, conjuring up visions of emotionally secure spaces and feelings of belonging. Yet, it can be a problematic term to use. The implication that returnees will be welcomed wholeheartedly by those who did not migrate, and that returnees can simply reinsert themselves back into old social and familial settings, and simply pick up from where they left off, is often erroneous. Far from being a ‘welcoming embrace’, the return experience might be one of ‘rupture and disillusionment’ (Christou and King, 2014), and extended family members in the home society could be ‘brothers only in name’ (Song 2009).

As King and Christou point out in their paper on ‘counter-diaspora’ (2011, p.453), the titles of some of the recent studies on return migration suggest as much. Returns can be ‘journeys of hope but also of despair’ (Ghosh, 2000), return can be an ‘unsettling path’ (Markowitz and Stefansson, 2004), and returnees may be ‘strangers in their homeland’ (Tsuda, 2003).

Despite settling into luxurious environs that resonate with their experiences in the previous receiving countries, returnees could continue to nurse multiple allegiances of diasporic and transnational imaginaries that translate into ‘conflicted subjectivities’ (Saar, 2017). How do these internal struggles impact the resettlement process? As one participant said to me wryly, *“we are not who we were when we left this land, all those years ago”*. In essence, this study concerns itself with the emotional experience of in-betweenness and liminality that infuses the lived reality of the returnee; it interrogates the possible mismatch between expectation and actuality, and the ways in which the returnee reconciles the old with the new.

Returning to a ‘new globalising India’

Over the last two decades, India has been witnessing its own return migration phenomenon, though it has remained largely unnoticed by the research community in the Global North. This thesis works with the Dustmann and Weiss definition of return migration as a ‘situation where the migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad’ (2007). A great many Indian migrant professionals, including the participants in this study, have chosen to voluntarily return to India (Tejada, 2013, Upadhya, 2013) - they were neither subjected to any coercion by the receiving society they were residing in, nor were they responding to overtures by the Indian government. In fact, there has been little evidence of overt state advocacy or policies created to actively encourage return migration to India, though a plethora of schemes have been floated by the Government of India that offer non-resident Indian investors (Lessinger, 1992) favourable rates of interest and partial citizenship categories through the Person of Indian Origin and Overseas Citizen of India programs. This is in line with the diaspora appeasement strategies of political parties such as the BJP, currently in power in India, who have been very vocal about their policies aimed at bolstering political and economic support from Indians abroad.

Aggressive political overtures are also being made to the Indian NRI communities through initiatives such as the ‘Pravasi Bhartiya Divas’ and ‘Make in India’. These initiatives, and the offer of partial citizenship, can be interpreted as the state’s attempt at extra-territorial incorporation of those who may no longer be citizens but may still identify culturally or socially with the original home country (Brand, 2002). However, while the government has initiated business-friendly policies and flexible bureaucratic processes to invite diasporic investment in

the country, there is yet, no strenuous effort being made to woo highly skilled migrant professionals back to resettle in India. In a speech to the Indian community in 2015, in San Jose, the Indian Prime Minister made an emotive statement to the group - *"The motherland is waiting for you"*. However, he went on swiftly to add *"Sometimes in India, we hear comments such as, 'Do something about the brain drain. It should be stopped.' I hold a different perspective on this. I feel that the brains are being deposited, and the deposited brains are looking for the opportunity to serve Mother India with interest whenever the opportunity comes"* (Mandhana, 2015). The ambiguity of his words suggests that while the Indian diasporic community would not be unwelcome in India, their support to the Indian nation from outside of the country is what is valued more, even solicited.

Regardless of the absence of a direct appeal to return, thousands of Indian skilled professionals have chosen to return to India from the Global North over the last two decades (CODEV-EPFL, I.D.S.K. and JNU, I., 2013). There is scant official data, however, on the exact number of highly skilled returnees to India, and on whether that return is permanent or temporary. While the increase in the movement of human capital from India to the developed West has led to a substantial body of literature generated about 'brain drain' or the movement of human capital from developing countries to the developed countries (Varma and Kapoor, 2013), return migration or 'brain gain' (Aleti, 2010) has, regrettably, not garnered the same degree of interest. A precise record of returnees is hard to find, though a report by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (2012) estimated the number of returnees at 10,000 to 20,000 a year since 2000. There is also sporadic reportage of returning migrants by institutions such as NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) which is India's largest information technology trade organisation. The NASSCOM Report notes that over 35,000 IT professionals returned to the city of Bangalore in south India between 2000 and 2004 (Varrell, 2011). By 2010, Bangalore is estimated to have received over 300,000 returnees (Kalita, 2010, p.22).

The Whys and Wherefores

The question is - why do people return at all? What are the push-pull factors that impel the course of return? Why would immigrants return to the country of origin, which could be, as in the case of India, a less economically developed society? Research into the motivations for return migration shows that a spectrum of factors exists. These can differ considerably, and sometimes overlap (Cassarino, 2004; Rogers, 1984). They cannot therefore be slotted neatly

into finite categories. Migration behaviour is context-dependent (Migration Data Portal, 2021). In the case of India, return migration could have been catalysed by the widening canvas of opportunities that opened up in the wake of the liberalisation of its economy in 1991 (Xavier, 2011), and the consequent flourishing of sectors such as IT, finance and media. At the turn of the century the mood in the country was one of elation and anticipation; the former Indian President Abdul Kalam had just co-authored a book about India as a 'Superpower 2020' in the making. The financial reforms introduced did not just accelerate India's integration into the world economy (Kapur, 2010; Heitzman, 2004), but also led to a spin-off effect by creating information societies in the home country. Many of these software start-ups were in fact set up by highly skilled Indian IT professionals and entrepreneurs, who combined their skill sets and the financial capital accumulated during their years overseas, to do so (Jonkers, 2008; Giordano and Terranova, 2012).

Access to foreign investment and technology, and international markets was made possible due to the strong transnational connections that returnees continued to nurture in both the receiving and the home countries (Jonkers, 2008; Dumont and Spielvogel, 2008). The NASSCOM-2017 Report revealed that the IT sector alone makes up about 9.3 per cent of India's gross domestic product, and is the largest private sector source of employment, worth over 154 billion dollars. Despite the negative impact of the Covid '19 pandemic on India's economy, the IT industry accounted for almost 8% of India's GDP in 2020 (IBEF, 2022). India's software services exports (excluding exports through commercial presence) increased by 4% in FY21 compared with FY20 and are estimated to be in the region of USD 133.7 billion during 2020-21 (IBEF, 2022).

It can be surmised that the compelling imaginary of a 'new globalising India' (Ilkjær, 2015), and the exponential growth of India's information society (Bhatt, 2018) played a major role in sparking the return of highly skilled Indian migrants back to the homeland, and to the city of Bangalore in particular (Chacko and Varghese, 2009). This included migrants who do not originally hail from the city. Alongside the unprecedented mushrooming of the IT industry in India, the city of Bangalore in south India was transformed into India's fastest-growing urban area, as per the density gradient pattern analysis between 1973 and 2010 (Ramachandra et al., 2012). With most of its green spaces giving way to steel and concrete blocks housing the headquarters of software and multinational companies, and technology parks, Bangalore is currently hailed as India's Silicon Valley (Heitzman, 2004; Nair, 2005).

Other motivations ascribed to return migration look beyond the economic aspect, and include political, social, demographic, and ecological factors (Massey and Jess, 1993). These range from restrictive immigration policies in the Global North (Tejada, 2013), to ethnic discrimination in the receiving society that can spark economically motivated return migration (Tsuda, 2013), and ‘homeland orientation’ (Brubaker, 2005). While the participants in this study acknowledge the call of the home country in terms of economic potential, what they enunciate most clearly is their need to reconnect with their family and community, to experience a sense of belonging, and make their way ‘home’.

In the chapters that follow, I point to how these individuals have had different migration life cycles and transnational experiences, yet almost all of them had similar motivations to return to their country of origin - the desire to spend time with ageing parents, and the conviction that their offspring will benefit from the exposure to ‘Indian culture’, and the various forms of social and community interaction that they themselves had experienced in their early years. We can infer from this that beyond the economic stability and status offered by global work opportunities, and aside from factors such as diasporic nationalism, lie strong pull factors such as family considerations (Djajić, 2008; Haug, 2008; Hugo, 2009), and the influence of this migrant professional community’s transnational connections (Sahay, 2009).

Research has shown that migrants maintaining strong transnational connections are most likely to nurture and plan their return (Carling and Erdal, 2014). Like other South Asian diasporic communities, the transmigrants in this study had stayed connected to family and community in their home country and drew liberally on technology platforms in the receiving country to do so. However, while practices such as emotional streaming through technology platforms actually help stabilise the peaks and troughs of longing for the homeland and enable the deintensification of a sense of loss (King-O’Riain, 2014), the need for physical co-presence remains a powerful force in the lives of immigrants (Baldassar, 2001; Baldassar et al., 2006). Coupled with the desire to reconnect with ‘home’, it can become a powerful driver of return.

The returnees in my study not just nurtured the notion of return, but carefully planned the timing of their return, taking into account the life stage they were at, while also making practical preparations such as checking out residential properties in Bangalore, and carrying out research on schooling options for their offspring. While complex push-pull factors of return contributed to the realisation of the return migration goal, the return itself was not an act of spontaneity or impulse.

The Voices in this Study

In this thesis, I foreground the voices of transnational, highly skilled migrant professionals who have lived and worked in the Global North before choosing to voluntarily return to India. I employ Iredale's definition (2001) to describe as 'highly skilled' those migrants who possess tertiary education or equivalent work experience, who hold a high degree of economic and social capital and are embedded in global professional networks. The literature on highly skilled migration from India notes that software professionals form a large component of the highly skilled migrant group.

The participants in this study are scaffolded by the financial security they have attained through their long stretches of employment in receiving countries as highly paid professionals, and almost all of them have returned on intra-company transfers which ensure continuity in their earning capacity as well as the potential to be hypermobile again. These participants must be differentiated from the British Hindu Gujaratis who after having settled in the UK during the 1960s and 1970s, actively plan to return to Gujarat, India for their retirement years (Näre, 2017; Ramji, 2006). Such a form of return migration can be understood as 'return of retirement' (Cerase, 1974), much like retiring from a job in one's old age and judiciously planning ahead for that state of life. As the author finds in her study of British Hindu Gujaratis belonging to the Leva Patidar community, who returned to their ancestral village of Madhapur in the district of Kutch, Gujarat, after spending decades in the UK, return migration is a project their community has actively nurtured in their hearts, envisioning it as a route to eventually 'finding peace' in a place where 'old people were respected' and a place of 'fulfilment' (Ramji, 2006, p.650). Indians have a long history of migration to Britain (Ramji, 2003; Burghart, 1987).

The findings from Ramji's study reveal that both London and Gujarat have been intrinsic to their sense of identity, and like the transnational migrants in my study, they straddle both receiving and home countries simultaneously, practising a simultaneity of belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) that helped them inhabit multiple transnational social fields (Basch et al, 1994). Other commonalities exist, between the group of highly skilled migrant professionals in my study and this group of British Hindu Gujaratis from the UK, both of whom choose to return to India of their own volition. Both groups cherished an imaginary of 'home' prior to

return, even though their reasons to return differ, both groups practised cultural reproduction in the receiving society.

Equally, their experience of rediscovering the home society was similar, in that it was marked by ambivalence and a degree of disillusionment that the reality fell short of expectation. Ramji's subjects appear to struggle with the realization that the Madhapur of their imagination had undergone a distinct evolution; they also had to depend on their old neighbours and social connections to find the right vendors and providers to set up home again and re-establish themselves in the community. Their longing to recapture the old way of life, was at odds with their desire to recreate the materially comfortable lifestyle they had enjoyed in London, and most of them opted to redesign their surroundings to suit their needs which the locals disparagingly referred to as their 'Londoni' ways (Ramji, 2006, p.653). Nevertheless, despite being 'disoriented to some extent by the changes and the ambivalence with which the locals viewed them, which reinforced their sense of 'inbetween placeness'' (Ramji, 2006, pp.653, 657), they were prepared to settle in for the long haul with no plans to re-migrate. It may be surmised that any desire to re-migrate to the UK once again could have been quelled by the sense of belonging to both London and Gujarat that they continued to nurse.

This does not always hold true for other British Indian migrant communities. Studies have indicated that over the last two decades, many older members of the Patidar community in Britain have chosen to return to India during the winter months every year, so much so that they have been hailed as 'international commuters' (Rutten and Patel, 2003, p.409). Some members have returned to India permanently, while others have returned with the intention of staying permanently in what they had long imagined was their 'home', but re-migrated to Britain again as they felt they did not quite belong to India (ibid. p.409).

The participants in my study, on the other hand, as their narratives indicate, occupy liminal spaces of in-betweenness wherein the possibility of re-migration lurks perpetually.

While the gap in the literature on return migration to India continues to persist, there is one group of migrants that has been the focus of several studies on worker rights and mobility policies in the Middle East - the temporary and low-skilled Indian workers who became the face of the migration flow to the Gulf countries in response to the oil boom there in the 1970s

(Rajan, 2018). These migrants have resorted to return migration frequently, both before and after the Covid 19 pandemic, due to reasons of fluctuating job security (Menon and Vadakepat, 2021; Rajan and Oommen, 2020). This form of return migration would seem to align with the Cerasean concept of 'return of failure' (1974) which refers to return migration brought about by coercion, or other kinds of involuntary return resulting in a loss of face, a sense of despair about goals unfulfilled, and accompanying uncertainty about the future.

The migration corridor from the southern Indian state of Kerala to the Gulf countries has always played a robust role in sustaining the economic health of Kerala, as also the countries and societies that are intertwined in the process; it is critical to the 'demand and supply dynamics of international migration flows in general' (Rajan and Pattath, 2022, p. 186). While the oil boom in the 1970s was the catalyst for Kerala's emigrants turning to the Gulf countries for employment in such large numbers, it was not entirely a new phenomenon.

Way back in the early part of the 20th century, the discovery of a vast oil field in Iran around 1908 led to a demand for Indian labour by British and American firms (Tumbe, 2018). Records show that in 1950, over 6000 Indians were employed by oil companies in the Persian Gulf - a number that steadily rose to 40,000 by the early 1970s; most of these workers were sourced from Kerala and distributed across the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. Subsequently, further oil price hikes in the mid-seventies and in 1979, led to massive profits for oil companies in the Gulf states and simultaneously, bolstered the need for increased labour supply for infrastructure creation (Tumbe, 2012). As has been pointed out, in a state like Kerala, where the tag of the 'most educated state in India' sits at odds with its dismal record of low prospects of employment, migration has 'contributed more to poverty alleviation than any other factor, including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation' (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 2001, pp.63-87).

Nearly 90 percent of emigration from Kerala continues to be directed towards the Gulf countries (Zachariah and Rajan, 2015). Emigrants are drawn from different socio-economic strata such as labourers, the middle-income group comprising traders, the self-employed, and technicians, as well as white collar workers and skilled professionals. Their motivations for migration revolve around the financial remittances they will be able to send back home, which will positively impact the lives of family members left behind in Kerala.

The highly skilled, white-collar workers aspire towards the enhanced lifestyle, and work and education opportunities they will be able to provide for accompanying family members. The fruits of their labour are varied, with the labourer class enduring job precarity, poor housing and living conditions, and 'the infamous kafala system of sponsorship whereby migrant workers become dependent on their employers for entry to and exit from the Gulf' (Tumbe, 2018, p.57), while the white collar workers grapple with issues such as navigating a multicultural milieu, and the 'stringent residency and citizenship laws of the land as well as the contractual nature of their work, which forbids them any basic rights guaranteed to migrant populations in other parts of the world' (Biswas, 2021, p.133). Studies indicate that it is the middle-income group which experiences relatively more satisfaction at the transformation of the lives of their family members back home (Osella and Osella, 2008).

However, research has consistently shown that one of the distinctive aspects of emigration from Kerala to the Gulf countries, is its temporariness (Zachariah and Rajan, 2015). This reflects the particular vulnerability of the Gulf migrant. Reasons for this range from arbitrary dismissals, anti-immigrant sentiment during economic downturns, to the controversial state policy in these countries of 'separation' rather than 'assimilation' (Tumbe, 2018, p.135). Despite the consolidation of immigration in these countries, Gulf migrants continue to chase citizenship rights and the civil rights associated with citizenship, and thus remain prey to political exclusion (Sater, 2013). Other significant factors that accelerated the trend of return migration included the turbulence of the 1990s Gulf War, fluctuating oil prices and the economic recession in the early 2000s. As a result, Kerala has witnessed a steady flow of returning migrants and they have emerged as a 'demographically, politically, economically, and socially significant component of Kerala's population' (Zachariah and Rajan, 2011, p.19). The Kerala Migration Survey (2008) conducted by the Centre for Developmental Studies estimated that there were about 1.185 million return emigrants in the state; the figure later went up to 1.25 million returnees (Zachariah and Rajan, 2016).

The most recent shock that destabilised the India-Gulf migration corridor occurred in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic which dramatically impacted economies across the globe, abruptly bringing human mobility to a halt (Ratha et al., 2021; Boillat and Zähringer, 2020; International Organization for Migration, 2020). In the aftermath of the pandemic, requests for repatriation of Indian nationals reached an extraordinary level, crossing over a million by September 2020,

with most requests coming in from the GCC countries; more than 9 million migrants returned to India by October 2021 (Rajan and Pathath, 2022).

In his budget speech in March 2022, Kerala's Finance Minister refers to the plight of almost 1.5 million migrants returning to the state (*ibid.*, p.180). While some had merely brought forward their date of return-as-retirement, many were forced to return against their wishes. Faced with problems like wage theft (Rajan and Akhil, 2022), and cancellation of work permits, and additionally, being stigmatised in their home state on arrival, as carriers of the virus (Khan and Arrokiaraj, 2021; Rajan, 2020; IOM, 2020), returnees struggled to resettle in India - a battle which is far from over. Returnees have found it difficult to regain the status they had previously enjoyed in better circumstances as Gulf-returned migrants who brought back adequate wealth back to pay off old debts, conduct marriages for their children, and build ostentatious houses - all of which had given them a special status in their community in the past.

Return to the home country from the Gulf countries has therefore been a mixed bag of experiences for the returnee - ranging from the early stages of recruitment and employment, the absence of any kind of social security cover (Srivastava, 2013; International Organisation for Migration, 2020), to a lack of awareness about government rehabilitation programmes that has accentuated emotions of uncertainty and frustration (Rajan and Pattath, 2022). Along with experiencing a sense of failure of their emigration project is the worry over repayment of debts incurred at the point of emigration, and the shadow cast over their futures by continuing job precarity in a state like Kerala known for its high unemployment record. This state of mind of the Gulf migrants can be contrasted with the confidence and systematic planning of the highly skilled migrant professionals in my study whose plans to return are scaffolded by the security of having highly paid, senior positions with signed contracts in place before arrival (given their previous global experience), as well as ample social and economic capital to approach the task of actualising their long nurtured dream of return to India with equanimity.

The male participants in my study are the lead return migrants, returning to India on intra-company transfers or new assignments with multinational companies. Their accounts reveal the challenges of navigating a different work ethos from what they were used to previously in the receiving country, as well as the shift in cultural expectations of gendered behaviour post return. However, acknowledging the gendered dimension to migration, and to

examine the identity construction of gender within the migration process (Christou, 2003), this study comprises more female participants than male. These returnees can be further grouped into the category of first generation, primarily managerial or professional elites in the areas of software or finance, between the ages of 40 and 50 who originally hailed from what is known in India as 'the middle class' segment of society.

One of the distinguishing features about the middle and upper middle classes in India is their ease of access to institutes of higher learning, enabled not just by their economic status but by the social and cultural capital they possess. Extant studies suggest that the social composition of the Indian IT workforce comprises the educated, upper caste, middle and upper middle classes with urban backgrounds (Krishna and Brihmadessam, 2006; Upadhyaya and Vasavi, 2006). While there is a growing group of software workers from non-Brahmin (including some Other Backward Class or OBC) castes, they are still in a minority; thus, the picture of an inclusive IT industry that is often projected in the Indian media, can be misleading (Upadhyaya, 2007; 2020). It is the upper caste Brahmins and landowning agricultural communities who have historically reaped the benefits of sought after opportunities in higher education and formal sector employment, especially in south India (Fuller, 1999; Fuller and Haripriya, 2007). Studies show that the majority of students enrolling in engineering and technology educational institutes in India continue to hail from the Hindu upper castes (Deshpande, 2006).

It can be argued, however, that it is not the upper caste factor alone that accounts for this situation. As it has been pointed out, given the pattern of inequality of opportunity in education that prevails in India, any occupation that requires a high level of education and training is bound to draw on the more privileged sections of society and therefore class as well as caste impacts and influences the outcome. Other influential factors include the existence of recruitment practices that privilege candidates with a social background who can be moulded into appropriate 'global professionals' (Upadhyaya, 2007, p.1864), resulting in a situation where merit alone does not warrant purchase.

The term 'middle class', while used liberally in India as an important category of self-identity (Upadhyaya, 2011, 2020), remains an abstruse, fuzzy concept. There is, notionally, the old middle class and the new middle class; while the old middle class is conceptualised as a community imbued with ideals such as thrift, 'sacrifice for the nation, self-sufficiency, and a leaning towards jobs in the public sector' (Deshpande, 2004, pp.144-146), the new middle class is situated within the private sector and specifically, the globalised economy, and 'represents the

political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalisation' (Fernandes, 2006, p. xviii). However, it must be noted that this new middle class is a diversified class that includes a form of lower middle class continuing to depend on government jobs, and those hailing from small towns and semi-rural sectors who aspire to be part of a more urban, economically secure class, as well as the upper middle-class segment that is globalised, highly educated, professional, and upwardly mobile. Information technology professionals are seen to constitute a highly visible section of this new middle class, carrying significant social and symbolic weight in the middle-class public sphere (Upadhyaya, 2011).

Returning migrant professionals, as for example the software professionals in this study, with their global lifestyles, well-paid jobs, enormous purchasing power, and transnational ways of being, can be said to be the most visible face of this new elite middle class. The sample in my study belongs to the category of first generation, hypermobile, and primarily managerial or professional elites in the areas of software technology, engineering, business management, or finance, between the ages of 40 and 50. All of them hail from the upper middle-class segment in India and hold ample social and economic capital. They are highly educated - 21 of the 24 participants in this study hold postgraduate degrees, while the remaining three have attained graduate degrees in nursing, software engineering and the humanities.

The parents of all the participants in this study belong to the 'old' middle class - at least one parent holds a graduate degree, and has worked as a salaried professional, many in the public sector. Almost all the participants in this study belong to the majority upper caste community, and have attended English medium schools and institutes of higher learning such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, and the Indian Institutes of Management, besides other private engineering and management schools, and many have subsequently acquired further postgraduate degrees in countries they have immigrated to, perhaps viewing American higher education as an additional route to augmenting competitive advantage at an international level.

Migrant professionals such as these are seen to be recipients of preferential treatment from receiving countries (Yeoh, 2006) - this includes being subjected to relatively liberal immigration regulations, which allows them to be accompanied by family members, including children and spouses. Perceived as the 'managerial elite' (Castells, 2011), these migrant professionals can circulate within and between transnational corporations as intra-company transferees (Liu, 2018). While the term 'elite' is conventionally used to describe groups of people who have 'the ability to exert influence' through 'social networks, social capital, and strategic position within

social structures' (Harvey, 2011, p.433), it can be appropriately used to represent highly skilled, highly paid professionals whose hypermobility is linked to professional growth.

As mentioned above, acknowledging the gendered dimension to migration, and in order to examine the identity construction of gender within the migration process (Christou, 2003), this study comprises more female participants than male. 14 of the 17 women interviewed, were migrant professionals holding responsible senior positions in the management cadre of multinational firms in the receiving country. At a certain stage, some of them had to adopt the role of 'trailing spouses' - a term that refers to the spouse or individual following in the tracks of, or accompanying their partner who is an internationally mobile professional (Cangi`a, 2017; Callan and Ardener, 1984; Walsh, 2007). Upon returning to the home society, seven of the female returnees found jobs in local companies, four of them became entrepreneurs, one of them continued her artistic pursuit, and the remaining female returnees focused on being homemakers. Almost all the male participants in this study who are the lead return migrants continued to hold full-time jobs on intra-company transfers or accepted new assignments with multinational companies, with a couple of participants turning entrepreneurs.

23 of the 24 participants have children, who studied at schools in the receiving country for a few years prior to return, and are currently enrolled in international schools in Bangalore, the city of return for the family. Most of the participants expect that their children will be leaving India to pursue undergraduate studies in the US, Australia, and other receiving countries.

Almost all the returnees have become members of an emergent yet swelling community who choose to live in gated complexes or 'pockets of prosperity and islands of well-being' (Nayyar, 2012) that provide a visible contrast to the congested residential spaces and socio-economic imbalances in the city, and the country as a whole.

Qualitative Research Design

This study frames the motivations of return as a backdrop to the lived experiences and mobility patterns of this growing community of highly mobile transmigrants. All through the data collection process, I adopt qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews. Purposive sampling, also referred to as 'a judgmental or expert sample' (Battaglia, 2008, p.645-47), helped in creating a small but representative pool of participants who could logically be said to represent the highly skilled return migrant population under study.

Located within the period of resettlement into the home society, this research inquiry focuses on their notions of identity, home, and belonging. Thus, both data collection and analysis necessitate an understanding of participants' life worlds as complex and multi-faceted. I therefore apply an interpretivist perspective to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of return migration and its complexity in a specific context, rather than generalising its significance for the whole population (Creswell, 2006).

i. Research Aims

Aware that return migration, and in particular return migration to India as an area of sociological inquiry, is still largely under theorised, the chief aim of this study was to address this gap in the literature. At the outset, I intended to examine and analyse the push-pull factors of return migration to India, contextualised within the milieu of increased mobility, globalisation, and transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009). However, after conducting a pilot study, and as I engaged more deeply with the scholarship in this area of migration studies, the research aims attained more clarity and purpose. I became convinced that shifting the research focus from the motivations for return migration to their experiences of resettlement, would widen the scope of the inquiry and facilitate an understanding of the factors that might influence their decision to settle back into the homeland for good, or to leave once again, thereby transforming the process of return migration into circular migration.

Part of the experience of living as a member of the diaspora is the internalising of the experience of living between two cultures. It facilitates an ever-evolving, transnational conception of self (Golbert, 2001) - a powerful reflexive narrative that courses through the migrant experience, and allows for a sense of dual belonging, a simultaneous incorporation in both home and receiving countries. The objective therefore is to examine the ways in which highly skilled migrant professionals forge multiple links across borders resulting in 'flexible subjectivities' (Corcoran, 2002), and to draw insights from how transnational 'ways of being' (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p.1002) shape their notions of identity, 'home' and belonging.

Furthermore, this thesis intends to explore the significance of space and setting for the returnee, and the influence of family and socio-cultural norms on the resettlement experience of the returnee.

Alongside this, is the objective of examining the identity construction of women within the migration process (Christou, 2003). In the early stages of research, shortly after conducting a pilot study in Bangalore, it became clear that the women migrants in this group had a crucial role to play, in both migration decision-making, as well as in processes of settlement in the receiving country, and resettlement, once back in the home society. Women are important, socially embedded actors in the act of 'doing family' (Morgan, 2011), and gender ideology continues to inform migration decisions (Kofman et al, 2005). These female migrants are also referred to in migration literature as 'trailing spouses'- a term commonly used in sociological literature to describe the spouse or individual following in the tracks of or accompanying their partner who is an internationally mobile professional (Cangi`a, 2017; Callan and Ardener, 1984; Walsh, 2007). This study delves into their personal experiences to understand how gender differences influence interspousal relations and domestic arrangements for these mobile couples (Schaer et al., 2017). By foregrounding the voices of the 'trailing spouses' in this group of returnees and eliciting their reflexive accounts of settlement and resettlement in both receiving and home societies, this research hopes to challenge the reified portrayal of the passive 'trailing spouse'.

I also consider the female immigrant's nurturing of familial bonds across borders, her constructions of feelings as appropriate to her situation, her interaction with the local environment, or lack of it, in the receiving society, and her feelings of inclusion and exclusion in work and social spaces. Cangi`a in her paper on the study of emotions in human mobility (2017, p.24) aptly describes emotions as the 'dialectics between socio- culturally situated and subjective experiences. These can be understood as processes that are "performed, practised, and displayed in a variety of situated and simultaneous interactions" (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015, p.74) and that are experienced through the engagement with the surrounding environment (Milton, 2002; Solomon, 2004). Emotions can simultaneously be subjective processes that are 'idiosyncratic, personal, and unalterably relative to the peculiar fabric of our lives' (Calhoun, 2004, p.111). A focus on the emotional work of the female immigrant allows us to consider the subjective dimension of emotions within migration processes.

Studies have also shown that returnees are not always perceived positively by those who have never migrated (Fonseca, Hart & Klink, 2015). This could mean that returnees in the

post-return environment inhabit spaces that represent 'home' but do not promise 'belonging'. This study will delve into the varied ways returnees navigate areas of incongruity between memory and experience.

ii. Site of Research

Over the last decade, Bangalore has emerged as the favoured city of resettlement for highly skilled migrant returnees and has been given the epithet 'world city'. A 'world/global' city is defined as one that is a hub for international legal, accounting, publishing, advanced telecommunications and producer services, and command and control operations (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1994), as well as corporate headquarters for many multinational firms. Accordingly, the city of return is Bangalore, where in-person fieldwork was conducted for over 11 months in 2019. In view of the pandemic, a second set of virtual interviews followed in 2020-'21. All the physical interviews were conducted at their homes inside gated complexes, and in other personal spaces, including the gated complex's own private club. Besides these interviews, I also spent a great deal of time in observation, and background research in different areas of the city of Bangalore which is the site of study. Subsequently, I carried out a thematic analysis of interview transcripts, and use open coding for emerging themes and concepts, such as identity construction, temporal influences, 'biographical disruption' (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008), relationship stories, network enablers, germinal moments, inconsistencies, contradictions, and 'place-making' (Tuan, 2003).

Since the late nineties, both Bangalore and Hyderabad have been linked to the global economy through firms that develop software and hardware, call centres catering to the needs of companies located in the United States and in Europe, and higher educational and research institutions (Heitzman, 2004; Nair, 2005; Ramachandraiah and Bawa, 2000). Bangalore appears to have an edge over Hyderabad not just because of its ascendance as a high-tech cityscape with deep ties to the global software industry, but because of its perceived cosmopolitanism (Chacko, 2007). The city's spirited pub culture, an expanding range of lifestyle stores and shopping malls, eateries offering international cuisines and exclusive international schools - all of it adds a patina of gloss to its emerging identity as a cosmopolitan hub. As Upadhyia notes, in her paper on the return of the 'global Indian' (2013, p.151), Bangalore has become,

‘symbolically as well as materially, the place where the idea of the “global” gets linked to that of the “Indian”, a process that unfolds in part through returnees’ strategies of “emplacement” (Narayan, 2002)’.

Most returnees to Bangalore choose to buy homes within luxuriously appointed gated complexes, or swanky self-contained apartment-complexes with large grounds that have sprung up both close to the modern city centre and in the newly developed high-income residential areas of the urban mid-periphery (Dittrich, 2007). Dominating the cityscape, and catering specifically to wealthy returnees and NRIs (Non-resident Indians), these gated communities or ‘GCs’ as they are referred to, have been blossoming on the peripheries of cities like Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad over the last 20 years (Bal, 2017; Chacko, 2007).

In the public mind, the ‘NRI who has returned’ is now inextricably associated with the extravagantly laid out gated complex*. Promoted as an exclusive living environment, these gated complexes are being projected as idyllic living spaces, providing its affluent residents with not just a home, but a ready-made community. A symbol of prestige, representing wealth and position, the GC appears to draw the elite returnee like a magnet. Chapter 5 in this thesis provides a more detailed sketch of these ‘pockets of prosperity’ (Bal, 2017, p.14). Accordingly, Bangalore* is the site of field research, where qualitative interviews were conducted with 24 returnees, at their homes and other personal spaces of resettlement inside gated communities. The gated community becomes the centrepiece of this research enquiry; a leitmotif that seems to recur across the investigative trail in this study.

{*Appendix 6, being submitted along with this thesis, is a photo-sheet, offering glimpses of Bangalore, and some of the gated complexes in the city).

Research Questions

Leading from these objectives, I designed the research questions that scaffold this study:

1. What is the impact of mobility on identity for first-generation, highly skilled Indian transmigrants in both the receiving country and country of origin post return? How do notions of ‘home’ translate into migrant homemaking? How do transnational migrants grapple with notions of simultaneous belonging?

2. How are notions of 'home' and 'belonging' understood within the setting of gated communities? To what extent do gated communities in India reinforce lines of separation and stratification in society?
3. How do female trailing spouses navigate the challenges of uprooting and resettling across the migration trajectories of their mobile partners? What role does gender ideology play in migration decision-making and resettlement into the home society?
4. What does return actually mean for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? Does return migration of the Indian diaspora mark the end of a cycle or does circular migration follow?

iii. On a Reflexive Note: Intention, Expectation, and Experience

'Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship', and consequently, those who do enjoy unbounded access to global mobility are viewed as 'privileged travellers' (Skeggs, 2004, p.49). However, these migrants may not have a sense of being 'anchored (socially, culturally and physically) either in their place of origin or in their place of destination' (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, p.4). Inhabiting multiple contexts that collectively can be called a 'social field' (Schiller et al., 1992), transnational migrants occupy disparate 'habitats of meaning' (Hannerz, 1996). As a researcher, I was keenly aware that their life stories are less about uprooting, and more about transplanting, less about displacement and more about settlement and resettlement. The attempt has been to gather their stories in as organic a form as possible and draw out the finer threads of meaning and yearning.

As the narratives in this study reveal, return migration is not a single experience. Despite the privileged status, and the economic and cultural capital they hold, returning to the country of origin does not promise to be a smooth process. Returnees could be drawn to perceived opportunities in the homeland but may be ill-prepared for situational constraints that could negate those expectations, which renders settlement difficult. In this thesis, I interpret the central idea of return in not just physical and spatial terms but in relation to the temporal dimension of migration. Return migration is about 'going back to a previous time in the past' (Tsuda, 2019, p.241). The past is what the migrant carries in his suitcase, in his roles as

immigrant as well as returnee. The past is often what draws him back. Yet the past cannot be re-lived in its fullness - 'nostalgic longings are very often impossible to satisfy' (Stefansson, 2004, pp.11-12).

Sifting through the rich data, I made note of the heterogeneity of the experience of return, which signals the importance of paying deep attention to the 'diversity, complexity, and instability of return as human experiences' (Long and Oxfeld, 2004, pp.1-15). Mobility and change, as Vathi points out in her important work on migration and psycho-social wellbeing (2017, p.1) can simultaneously 'trigger a multiple need for relating, belonging and homemaking'. Thus, return migration can be conceptualised as a crucible wherein the search for 'home' and identity becomes the central, transformative experience for the migrant.

Structure of the Thesis

i. A Migrant by any Other Name

In the absence of a single, legal definition of the term 'highly skilled migrant' (IOM, 2019), varying criteria could be used to describe these individuals. In this thesis, I have drawn on Iredale's definition (2001) to describe as 'highly skilled' those migrants who possess tertiary education or equivalent work experience, who hold a high degree of economic and social capital, and ease of access to global professional networks. I also occasionally refer to these returnees as 'migrant professionals' (Meier, 2015) - a term that describes a group of people whose formal skills in the areas of software or finance are welcomed in the receiving country, allowing them to hold a high position in their firms, and enjoy better social status. Their situation is unlike that of many others, who, despite being highly skilled in certain areas, find that their formal certifications from certain countries of origin are not accepted in the host country, which results in a level of deskilling of the migrant's qualification. Still others obtain jobs that are not commensurate with their skills, and thus end up unemployed or in jobs that require a lower formal qualification.

Another term 'transmigrant' is particularly applicable to my study. A newer entry into the migration lexicon, it is derived from the concept of transnationalism; it specifically refers to immigrants who construct social fields linking together their country of origin and their country of settlement (Schiller et al., 1992). Importantly, transmigrants represent 'boundaryless global talent' (Carr et al., 2005) whose migratory actions reinforce and impact global talent flows.

Training the research lens on their ties with the country of origin, and the way they remain engaged with the possibility of return, can help decode how returnees align the notional idea of return with actualising the dream, and how they negotiate the complexities of lived experience.

ii. The Flow of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is the **Introduction** to this thesis, which lays out the premise of the inquiry, the gap in the literature it attempts to fill, and presents the research rationale. It then offers an overview of the motivations for return, the context of return to India, and dwells on the specific kind of participants in this study. Finally, it outlines the research aims, objectives and questions, and outlines the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is titled **Contextualising and Conceptualising Return Migration**. It offers a brief overview of the theoretical debates about return migration - its historical trajectory and the changing nature of its characterisation in the literature. It considers its increasing importance in a world of accelerated mobility and globalisation and draws attention to the 'return turn' in migration scholarship. This section argues for the need to interrogate the dominant view of return migration as rooted in either economic motivations or 'homeland orientation' and suggests that there is abundant room to incorporate the emotional dimension to migration in the literature. It also draws on the scholarship on identities, 'home', and gender, and moves on to describe the theoretical and conceptual philosophies that underpin this thesis.

Chapter 3 delineates the **Methodology** adopted in the study, the qualitative research methods employed in the collection and analysis of data. It also details the ontological and epistemological positions adopted, researcher positionality and reflexivity, and the management of ethical issues in the study.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are the empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 is titled **'The Identity Project: Dual Belonging and the un-fixedness of 'Home''**.

This chapter considers the impact of hyper-mobility on the identity project of first generation, highly skilled transmigrants in both receiving country, and country of origin after return migration. I reflect on how transmigrants articulate the 'new mobilities paradigm', going beyond the imagery of fixed encapsulated terrains for social processes (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.209).

Their narratives are parsed to glean insights into the returnee's 'ways of being and ways of belonging' (Levitt and Schiller, 2004), and the identity-building that takes place around the acts of relocation, dislocation, and resettlement in their life course. The lack of an exclusive affiliation to any one place suggests that transnational actors have the capacity to hold multiple identities, even a 'global' identity (Upadhyay, 2013). The simultaneity of belonging that transmigrants experience due to the 'transnational habitus' they inhabit (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018) is a dominant note in the inquiry. How does this hybridization of identity influence their immersion into varying cultural settings, and does membership in the so-called model minority help stave off provocations such as racial microaggressions?

This chapter also pays attention to how, like many other overseas Indians, the participants in this study actively sought channels for self-identification and worked at keeping notions of 'home' alive through acts of cultural reproduction in the receiving country. Aware that advanced digital connectivity today facilitates virtual homemaking, I look closely at how the transmigrant negotiates socio-spatial and emotional relationships using polymedia and actualizes familyhood. Additionally, I probe the idea of 'elite civic activism' manifested in the returnees' oft-professed desire to *"give back something to society, to do something for India"*.

Chapter 5 is titled 'Gated Communities: Living in a Bubble'. This chapter focuses on how life for returnees inside exclusive, high-security gated communities, surrounded by people 'like' themselves, leads to the formation of an upper-class elite identity, and place-based forms of solidarity based on inter-dependencies within the group. Living in a 'bubble' they occupy spaces of in-betweenness, hovering between immersion and withdrawal; the gated community gradually becomes a spatial expression of identity construction. I also study the evolution of Bangalore as a site of intersection for the 'old' and 'new' India as diverse social actors from varying backgrounds and unequal access to socio-economic capital are tied up in structurally interconnected social fields. Gated communities therefore become 'sites of mobility convergence' (Bal et al, 2017, p.15). I observe the transformation of a city impacted by processes of return migration, with lines of social stratification becoming more pronounced as gated communities or 'pockets of prosperity and islands of well-being' (Nayyar, 2012, p.xii) pushes its residents to the top of the class hierarchy.

Chapter 6 is titled ‘Trailing Spouses: Tales of Resilience’. This chapter probes the micro-narratives of the female ‘trailing spouse’ within the migration process. The existing literature on trailing spouses predominantly highlights the boundaries that circumscribe her professional prospects because she prioritises the career trajectory of her professional spouse above her own. I argue that such a narrative offers a limited view of her lived reality, for it suggests an inherent passivity and lack of agency that may, in fact, be far from true. What has remained largely invisible is her agency in meaning-making in the personal, familial, or societal spaces. I strive to make the case that the very term ‘trailing spouse’ does little justice to the agentic and partnering role that the female spouse plays at every stage of the migration journey. This chapter demonstrates just how critical a role women play in migration, and how their acts of meaning-making in the personal, familial, or societal spaces contribute to the success of the settlement and resettlement process.

Chapter 7 is titled ‘Narratives of Resettlement: But why did you come back in the first place?’

This chapter presents the dilemmas and challenges of resettlement and employs a critical lens on the influence of family/extended family, friendship and community ties, and the importance of social networks in shaping the returnee’s readaptation to the home society. What does return actually mean for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? Returnees in my study have found that it is an uphill battle to be accepted as people serious about their intent to stay. Particularly galling is the need to continually justify their decision to return, in answer to the incredulous question posed by their own extended family members, *“But why did you come back in the first place?”*

This chapter also critically engages with the empirical data to illustrate both the importance of family dynamics in shaping migration behaviour (Chamberlain, 1997), and the cultural imaginaries that have guided the life course of the female migrants, and consequently that of their families. I interrogate the ways in which returnees balance the cultural expectations of the home society with the cultural norms that they have acquired and become habituated to in the previous receiving society. Acknowledging that the behaviour of the receiving society towards returnees can influence their future migration decisions, I work to tease out and analyse the interconnecting threads between return migration, expectation fulfilment, and circular migration.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter in this thesis. It provides an overview of the study, a discussion of its key findings, and highlights the contributions and conceptual implications of this thesis. I also reflect on the methodological limitations of the study, and finally, outline a few of the pathways of future research.

Chapter 2

Contextualising and Conceptualising Return Migration

As the introductory chapter has stated, this thesis focuses on an understudied area within migration studies - the phenomenon of return migration, and, in particular the relatively overlooked subject of return migration to India. Addressing this gap in social science literature, the research adopts a qualitative approach to gathering and analysing data on highly skilled returnees to India, and their lived experiences within the sphere of resettlement. While the motivations for return provide the backdrop for the study, the thrust of the inquiry is to examine the resettlement and adaptation experiences of the returnees, and the ways in which they self-reflexively construct identity while navigating persisting notions of dual belonging.

In this chapter, I acknowledge prior scholarship relating to return migration in the field of migration studies in order to provide context, and to acknowledge how the existing literature scaffolds this study. The sections that follow consider the theorising of return migration and the typologies that have emerged in the wake of growing acknowledgement of the importance of return migration. I then identify significant gaps in the literature and conclude by reviewing theories and concepts that this work draws on to address those lacunae.

An Unsung Presence

When Russell King famously observed in 2000 that ‘Return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration’ (p.7), he may not have anticipated that 22 years later he would be moved to rewrite the statement as ‘Over the past two decades, return migration has evolved to take its place as a cornerstone in the field of migration studies’ (King & Kuschminder, 2022, p.1). The attention to processes of return migration has been long overdue. The possibility of ‘returning one day’, regardless of its potential of becoming a reality, has underpinned many a migration narrative (Foxen, 2020). For example, in a study conducted with Pakistanis, mainly Punjabis and Mirpuris, living in Rochdale in Manchester, Anwar (1979) emphasises the ‘myth of return’ - a yearning to go back to their homeland, and their lifelong efforts to save up enough money to do so one day. The findings of that study suggested that for many in the community, the desire to return remained largely notional, though it continued to inform the construction of strong kinship networks across both nations. As has been noted, ‘all migrants can relate to the possibility of return’ (Carling et al., 2015, p.1).

However, the majority of twentieth century scholars viewed migration as a one-way, finite process. Although Ravenstein's (1885, 1889) provided one of the earliest descriptions of return migration as a 'counter current' to the principal migratory flow, set out in 'laws of migration', it was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that return migration began to receive in-depth scholarly attention through authors such as Cerase (1974), Davison (1968), King (1978). Bovenkerk's paper (1974) for instance, explored various types of return including ancestral return. Gmelch, one of the earliest scholars to study and analyse return migration, drew attention to how the nature of migration had changed, defining return migration as 'the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle' (1980, p.136).

Theoretical debates and critical essays opened up a field of inquiry into return migration (Council of Europe, 1987; Rogers, 1984). Early migration research focused on the ways or extent to which migrants adapted to, or were excluded from the receiving environment (Vertovec, 2001). By the 1990s, migration scholarship had begun to note the migrant's attachment to societies, traditions and causes in their country of origin (Basch et al., 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Faist, 2000). Case studies began to feature descriptions of migrant participation in social, cultural, and economic activities in both, receiving and home countries.

Yet, despite intermittent acknowledgement of the role of 'return' in the meaning-making of migrants, scholars have pointed out that the phenomenon of return migration remained a largely unsung presence in both sociological and migration studies literature (Cassarino, 2004; King and Kuschminder, 2022; Kunuroglu, 2016; Rogers, 1984). In one of the earliest comparative analyses, Stefansson (2004, p.3) remarks that until the turn of the 21st century, 'return movements across time and space have largely been ignored in anthropology and migration research'. It is only in the last 15 years that a 'return turn' in migration literature (King and Kuschminder, 2022, p.16) has been observed, one which contextualises return within globalisation and transnationalism.

It has been theorised that this inattention to return migration may stem from an assumption that resettling in the home country should be less difficult than adjusting to a new one (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016). It is also possible that returnees are being overlooked as 'invisible migrants' who just blend back into their home-country societies (Szkudlarek, 2010). In the case of highly skilled professionals with a high degree of social, cultural and economic capital, return and readjustment to the home society is often taken to be straightforward, and devoid of significant problems, (Föbker et al., 2014). Part of the reason for the gap in the literature

regarding resettlement of such returnees may be the analytical limitations of the set of categories used to understand the meaning of return migration. The data that is systematically collected on return migration is typically divided into categories like forced migration, forced return, and assisted voluntary return.

The IOM (International Organisation for Migration) Glossary on Migration (2019) describes forced migration as a ‘migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion’, and forced return as ‘the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision’ (p.77). Voluntary return is ‘the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee’ (ibid., p.229), which can be further subdivided into categories of ‘spontaneous’ or ‘assisted’. Assisted voluntary return and reintegration is the ‘administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin’ (ibid., p.12).

The sociological emphasis continues to be largely on forced and assisted return, against the backdrop of rigorous state monitoring of migration, and the anti-migrant sentiment amongst both political leaders and the electorate. These are important foci. Nevertheless, scholars note that the historical neglect of return migration across a wider spectrum has resulted in gaps continuing to persist in the literature (King and Kuschminder, 2022). My study aims to address these gaps.

While existing categories have contributed much to our understanding of migration, they do not apply to the type of migration adopted by highly skilled professionals returning voluntarily to their countries of origin in the Global South for reasons unconnected to force, emergency, or precarity. Therefore, highlighting the relative lack of attention to the experiences of highly skilled overseas Indians voluntarily returning to India can open up new analytical ground for examining dimensions of belonging and identity, currently overlooked.

Tracing the Counter Current: Theorising Return

A widely accepted definition today is one where return migration is described as ‘a situation where the migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a

significant period of time abroad' (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007; King, 2000). Yet, temporal markers are not always straightforward to define. Initially, return migration was framed as denoting the end part of the migration cycle (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008; Stefannson, 2006). This understanding has now been expanded to incorporate the idea that return movement may be only another step in the cycle as people lead increasingly fluid lives of mobility. Contemporary theorists also consider the circular routes that migrants might take in their travel. Transnational mobility and circular migration are gradually transforming the 'permanent' nature of return migration (Baubock and Faist, 2010).

Thus, return migration need not be a linear line of progression, it could happen instead in jumps and starts, marked by ambivalence and trepidation. Additionally, the notion of migrants moving back in a linear path to where they came from is undermined straightaway by the fact that the place of resettlement is not always the place of origin, thus challenging the conventional understanding of coming 'back' (Carling et al, 2015). It can be seen that previous definitions of return migration are being reworked today to incorporate these elements of ambivalence and flexibility such that 'there is no singular diasporic 'Return' with a capital R, but only multiple 'returns' in the plural' (Tsuda 2019, p.239).

In view of the multi-faceted migratory movements taking place currently across the globe, Xiang Biao asks rhetorically - 'Does it still make sense to talk about "return" at a time when population movements become multi-directional, identity is replaced by hybridity, the local community is entangled with transnational space, and "home" and "away" are both destabilised and the division between are blurred?' (2014, pp.167-182).

It seems fitting to answer in the affirmative, given recent innovations in scholarship that seek to view migration as more fluid and liminal than the act of simply crossing borders (see Phipps, 2022). As Biao himself points out, it is even more crucial today to research the return phenomenon in view of the various kinds of return migration that are taking place all over the globe (Biao, 2014). It is a reflexive process, undertaken for reasons that transcend the economic or the rational; often, 'return is a category that people themselves use, embellish, and understand' (Long and Oxfeld, 2004, p.3). There is now a marked difference in approaches to return migration, moving from what King and Christou call a 'simplistic model of migration' to a more 'nuanced exploration of the ontology of return, stretching its meaning across time,

space and generations, and where the 'place' of return and the type of movement can have various expressions – real, virtual, imagined, desired, forced or denied' (2011, p.453).

Do we need Typologies of Return Migration?

Although it might seem impossible to define a phenomenon as multifaceted as return migration, it helps to consider the typology that is springing up in the wake of the many kinds of return. The sheer diversity of migrant categories makes this necessary - diasporic migrants, refugees, business travellers, sojourners, expatriates, asylum seekers (Moeller et al, 2015). Given its heterogeneous nature, a typology of return migration can be very helpful to understand how migration essentially unfolds in time and space (Malmberg, 1997) and is therefore defined against thresholds of distance and 'time in migration' (Cwerner, 2001). King, for instance, distinguishes between return based on time invested in the home country - infrequent and brief visits, annual returns, returns that last a longer duration albeit with the intention of leaving again, and lastly, return and resettlement that appears to be permanent (2000). Long and Oxfeld (2004, p.4) differentiate between 'return migration' and 'return'; the first term refers to the corporeal relocation of the migrant who intends to stay for a length of time in the home society - this stay could be either temporary or permanent. The second term 'return' relates to both short term visits, or even forced return. King and Christou refer to both as 'return mobilities' (2011, p.452), and additionally emphasise the need to differentiate between first- and second-generation returnees.

Drawing on a year-long ethnographic study in Italy and Switzerland, Wessendorf developed the concept of 'roots migration' to describe (return) 'migration to a place where members of the second generation originate from, but where they have never lived' (2013, p.1084). Second generation return migration is a nascent field of research, though there exists significant work by Christou (2006) and Panagakos (2004) on the children of transatlantic migrants such as Greeks from North America, and by Potter (2005), on the offspring of Caribbeans from the UK returning to their parents' country of origin, among other similar studies.

To these above categories, King and Christou (2008; 2011) have added one called 'counter-diasporic migration' based on a study of Greek second- generation returnees situated within diaspora studies; they observe that there is inadequate research on diasporic return, in other words - 'reversing the scattering' of the diaspora (Van Hear and Boomgaarden, 1998, p. 48).

‘Counter-diasporic’ return is qualitatively different from ‘ethnic return migration’ (Tsuda, 2009), ‘roots migration’ (Wessendorf, 2013) and ‘ancestral return’ (Teerling, 2014).

What gaps linger?

Upon reviewing contemporary literature, two opportunities to contribute a fresh perspective reveal themselves.

i. Return Migration to India

Undoubtedly, the geographical diversity of return migration scholarship is increasing. This century has been witness to sweeping technological advances, along with globalisation, that have brought about accelerated mobility and transnationalism. It is a ‘shrinking world’ in which people are in contact with “cultural ‘otherness’ in unprecedented ways” (Kosnick, 2009, p.164). Despite the devastating effects of the pandemic, and despite the decrease of around 27 per cent in the projected growth in international migrants from July 2019 to June 2020, the number of international migrants was estimated to be almost 281 million globally in 2020 (IOM, 2022), with nearly two thirds being labour migrants (UNDESA, 2019; ILO, 2018). This is up from 258 million in 2017, 220 million in 2010, and 150 million in 2000 (IOM, 2020). Europe was the region with the largest number of international migrants in 2020 at 87 million. Northern America hosted the second largest number of migrants - nearly 59 million; followed by Northern Africa and Western Asia, with a total of nearly 50 million (UNDESA, 2020).

Research on return migration has started to span more and more of these cross-cultural trends, with a rising body of studies emerging on ‘ethnic return migration’ which refers to later-generation descendants of diasporic peoples who return to their countries of ancestral origin after living outside their ethnic homelands for generations (Tsuda, 2013, p.172). The contexts probed in this rising body of work include returnees from Ethiopia (Kuschminder, 2017); Puerto Rico (Aranda, 2007); Cypriot (Teerling, 2014); Greek (Christou & King, 2014); Kazakh (Blum, 2016); Kyrgyz (Sagynbekova, 2016); Mexican Rothstein, 2016); Brazil (Fazito, 2009); and Somali (Galipo, 2018). However, even though ‘a comparative ethnography of return has taken shape’ (Pauli, 2021, p.95), South Asia remains relatively under-researched. Moreover, recent innovations by migration scholars to prioritise decolonial approaches (e.g., Phipps, 2009) suggest the need to revitalise the field of migration studies with nuanced explorations of postcolonial, non-Western settings.

Turning the lens on South Asian migration, it can be seen that the Indian diaspora world- wide, which had its genesis in a post-colonial context, has been growing steadily. The 2022 World Migration Report finds that India is the largest origin country in the world with over 18 million people living abroad; Mexico is the second most significant origin country at around 11 million. Russia is in third place, and China in fourth position (IOM, 2022). This increase in migrants can partly be attributed to the surge in demand for skilled migrants over the last two decades, the majority of whom come from developing countries (Constant, 2021).

However, a lesser known yet growing trend is that of *return* migration to India. Statistics indicate that over a quarter to a third of migrants globally are beginning to return to their country of origin (Azose and Raftery, 2019), although not all returns are officially recorded (Migration Data Portal, 2022). However, pioneering scholarship has pointed to the growing trend of ‘brain gain’ in India (Tejada, 2016), and emphasised the benefits of examining Indian migration as circular rather than one-directional (Qin, 2015; Trumbour, 2007).

Other scholars have noted the analytical scope that Indian returnees’ narratives offer (Tejada et al., 2014). Even so, highly skilled returnees’ social and cultural experiences and subjectivities are still under-theorised compared to other themes in Indian migration literature. The next section explores more fully the opportunity to contribute fresh perspectives on the micro-level social and relational realities of return.

ii. The Micro-level Lived Realities of Return

Migration within globalisation is a complex process requiring a consideration of both structural factors and human agency (Easthope, 2009). Yet, much sociological interest in return migration has focused on the political dimensions of return to the country of origin (Pauli, 2021, p.95). In the last decade in particular, state interest has led to the structuring of new policies, some of them intended to target the ‘undesirable’ migrant and the redundant migrant and remove them from receiving countries (Akesson and Baaz, 2015). Some policies are created in the name of development with returning migrants viewed by the country of origin as ‘agents of change’ (Pauli, 2021). For instance, homeland governments such as the Vietnamese government actively encourage the return of migrants settled in the Global North, eager to have them participate in the home country’s economy through investment and technological expertise (Tsuda and Song,

2019, p.27). Similarly, other countries like Ghana and Senegal have actively initiated policies to encourage and facilitate the return of highly skilled migrants (Akesson and Baaz, 2015, p.1). Here, return migration can be understood as providing the juncture where nation-state interest intersects with transnational mobility (Xiang, 2013, p.3). As Pauli points out, the increase in return migration literature appears to be running parallel to the 'heightened scholarly awareness of these state interests, policies, and dynamics' (2021, p.96).

As valuable as this macrosystemic interest in the state is, it also means there is a need for more 'micro-level, narrative studies of the everyday reality of global mobility' (Favell, Feldblum and Smith, 2006, p.3) that can hold up the different strands of lived experience to scrutiny. Moreover, it appears that subtler dimensions of belonging and social identity have not been prioritised in some dominant theories of the relationship between migration and development. As Cassarino (2004) argues, a critical analysis of the phenomenon of return migration is vital to deciphering the relationship between migration and development. Offering a detailed categorization of the theories of return migration, Cassarino differentiates between four theoretical approaches - Neoclassical Economics, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), the Structural approach, Social Network theory, and Transnationalism.

Neoclassical economists perceive return migration as a failure of the migration experiment, wherein the migrant has miscalculated the costs of migration (Kunuroglu et al, 2016, p. 5) or has failed to leverage it sufficiently and has no other recourse but to go back to his homeland – an argument similar to Cerase's 'return of failure' theory. The New Economics of Labour Migration theory, meanwhile, shifts the perception of return migration from failure to self-determination, and interprets return migration as the natural outcome of a successful experience abroad during which migrants met their goals (i.e. higher incomes and accumulation of savings) while naturally remitting part of their income to the household. This intertwining of remittances and migration decision-making was central to the NELM perspective in the 1980s and 1990s (Taylor, 1999).

Today, remittances continue to be analysed within the narrow confines of the 'economic logic of mobility' perspective (Cohen and Sirkeci, 2021, p.1), and the migration-development context where it is considered as a form of development finance complementing

development assistance (Carling et al, 2015). While these economic theories can be credited for considering both the individual and the family as a single decision-making unit, thus widening the ambit of analysis (De Haas, 2010), yet they are limited in that they do not consider the constraints and challenges of return migration or evaluate the behaviour of the individual at the centre of the process (De Haas, 2010). Both Neoclassical Economics Theory and the New Economics of Labour Migration approaches can therefore be critiqued for their dominant focus on utility-maximisation, and their tendency to ignore return migration factors such as the longing to reclaim cultural roots or transnational duality of belonging.

For example, when analysing the issue of remittances mentioned previously in the Indian context, the limitations of a purely utilitarian economic lens become clear. A number of recent studies have highlighted the consistently high volume of financial remittances to the home country by Indian migrants (Afram, 2012; Guha, 2011; IOM, 2020; Rajan, 2012) and the accruing benefits to India thereof. India is one of the top 3 remittance recipients, accounting for USD 78.6 billion in 2018 (World Bank, 2019). It has long viewed the Indian diaspora as a source of financial support by way of remittances that has been flowing into the country over the last few decades (Singh et al, 2012).

However, quantifying the volume of remittances alone would not suffice to glean insights into the drivers of remittance decisions. The advantage of viewing remittances within the gamut of transnational practices including return visits and virtual interaction, is that it focuses on migrant behaviour, and the relationship between the sender and the receiver. Such an approach would shift the emphasis from the dyadic economic relationship between households in the society of origin and the remitter, to the strong transnational bond they share that transcends geographical boundaries. For example, Singh et al (2012) use the case study of professional Indian migrants in Australia to explore how family remittances function as a form of transnational care. The authors examine how gender significantly shapes remittances and gifts as well as inheritance in the transnational family, and situate their work within the sociology of money and care. As Carling observes, financial remittances must be understood as merely 'the crux of multi-faceted exchanges, experiences, and social consequences that reach far beyond the economic realm' (2020, p.10). While remittances are not the focus of this thesis, this example is presented to demonstrate the shortcomings of

purely utilitarian economic theories such as Neoclassical Economics Theory and New Economics of Labour Migration – namely, their lack of consideration of key social, emotional, and relational influences on the lived realities and practices of return migration.

Making this critique seems particularly important given that returnees' social and cultural experiences and subjectivities situated within Indian migration studies are still under- theorised compared to other phenomena. For example, a substantial body of literature examines the phenomenon of 'brain drain' or skilled migration from India (Aleti, 2016; Qin, 2014). Fewer studies examine the journeys and experiences of skilled migrants *returning* to India. Those that do take this focus have taken a largely economic focus on entrepreneurship, resource-utilisation and workforce engagement; for example, case studies of returnees' perceptions of India's entrepreneurial climate and their technological and managerial contribution to the economy (Zagade and Desai, 2017); how engineer- returnees make human capital and financial capital investments (Qin, 2014); how engineers' intentions to return to the Indian workforce after studying abroad may enhance human capital development (Varma & Kapur, 2013); and how returnees with IT expertise can increase capital revenue flows into India (Hunger, 2004).

This work is rich. However, it tends to have a purely pragmatic focus on treating returnees and their transnational assets as sources of income generation and human capital development. In the words of one study that can be considered characteristic of this literature, skilled Indian returnees are a 'lever for development' who can 'channel' and 'transfer' their 'knowledge, skills, and financial resources' for 'the development of India' (Kumar et al, 2014, p. 263). The samples of these studies tend to consist exclusively of returnees with engineering, managerial, or technological skills. While their analyses produce useful economic insights, what gets overlooked is returnees' social and cultural meaning-making around choosing to return to their homeland after their diasporic experiences. Indeed, the body of work on Indian returnees, as well as Indian migration as a composite, appears to be dominated by discourses of 'brain drain' or its reverse, in strictly economic terms of resource-utilisation (Khadria, 2013).

In the process, more intangible insights around home, belonging, identity and family may be lost, and the affective dimensions of migration (see Phipps, 2022; Phipps & Kay, 2014). Rizvi's critique proves useful here. He points out that, within Indian migration studies, there is a need to 'look beyond the human-resource analyses that dominate much of the literature' and

transcend the discourse of brain drain or brain gain, as ‘this analysis is insufficient to account for the complex *cultural* dynamics of movement’ and ‘overlooks the processes of people reimagining their identities, social affiliations, and national obligations’ (2005, p. 177, italics mine). The few studies which offer this type of insight attend to the conflicts and contradictions within returnees’ subjectivities, from families torn between social independence abroad and kinship pressures in India (Bhatt, 2018) to the ‘new global Indian woman’-returnee who articulates cosmopolitan discourses of management and privatisation while managing domestic help (Bhatt, Murthy & Ramamurthy, 2010, p.141).

These analyses transcend the economic and delve into the sociocultural dimensions of the ‘global scripts enunciated within returnee households’ (Bhatt et al, 2010, p.142). They lead me to concur with Rizvi that Indian migration studies stand to be enhanced by more attention to the ‘cultural politics of identity, mobility, and globalisation’ (Rizvi, 2005, p.177). My study thus aims to help augment the literature on sociocultural analyses of the Indian returnee’s meaning-making and their liminal processes of ‘moving-between - between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, environments, as a dialectic between movement and fixity’ (Rapport and Dawson, 1998, p.33).

At this point, influential theories of return migration that acknowledge its social context prove useful. The structural approach to return migration suggests that return migration be analysed with reference to the ‘social and institutional context in the country of origin’ (Cassarino, 2004; Cerase, 1974; King, 1986). This widening of the lens is an advantage of the Structural approach; it accounts for the influence of the origin country on the return experience. This is borne out in the findings of Lewis and Williams (1986) who highlight the link between a cooperative and welcoming locality and a positive return migration experience. However, although Structural Theory works well in contextualising return within both the sending and receiving countries, it fails to capture the finer details of the migrant’s experiences in the particular environment (Kunuroglu et al, 2016). This theoretical lens also overlooks the minutiae of resettlement processes - how returnees interact with the home society on a daily basis, what social pressures they navigate, how they may have to adapt to the cultural habitat to which they return.

This limitation is partially addressed through the Social Network theory, which does acknowledge the social context (Cassarino, 2004). It treats migrants as social actors who harness resources within their networks to prepare to return to their place of origin or 'home' (Cassarino, 2004). The theory also explores how the migration of a single individual affects a broader social network, producing forms of social capital that members of the network can use to facilitate their own return (Bilesen et al, 2018). While my research does not focus on intergenerational or cross-network migration flows, Social Network theory is useful in its attention to the discernible pattern of exchange of resources that sustain migrants' social and economic networks and create long-term interpersonal relationships. These cross-border networks that are maintained over great distances, can be seen as a 'collectively shared subjective awareness' (Laumann et al., 1983) which informs this study's understanding of participants' social and relational life worlds.

Significant analytical aids emerge from the work of Francesco Cerase (1974), whose attention to the migrant's meaning-making, motivations and values seem highly relevant to this research. Based on his research into return from the United States to Italy, Francesco Cerase proposed four categories to explain the different kinds of return of first-generation immigrants: return of failure, conservatism, retirement, and innovation (1974). 'Return of failure' relates to a situation when the immigrant cannot adapt to the destination country either because of discrimination (perceived or real), or other social and political factors and chooses to return, albeit with loss of face in the home country. As Qureshi et al point out in their work on the Punjab–United Kingdom migration corridor, an unsuccessful emigration experience which results in migrants returning to their home state could lead to them being treated with disrespect, or viewed as 'failed subjects', or 'de/emasculated subjects'; and 'only subsequent success could remove the stigma' (2012, p.49).

Cerese's theory of 'return of conservatism' is one where the immigrant is sticking to his original intentions and value-systems – namely, making enough money to buy property back home or achieving financial stability to a degree, and now wanting to return to the social and cultural norms of the familiar home country. 'Return as retirement' can be likened to retiring from a job in one's old age; and finally, 'return of innovation' that relates to a more dynamic group of immigrants who have spent a fair length of time abroad, have acquired new skill sets, and now perceive themselves as 'agents of change'. The people in this group wish to return and make a difference in their home country.

An analytical strength of Cerase's (1974) four-category model is that it draws connections between migrants' motivations, expectations, positioning, and integration in their receiving and home countries. Research of this kind helps flag the crucial role of returnees' own understandings of their identities and purposes, and how their subjectivities influence their return and reintegration. In addition, Cerase's model represents a pioneering effort to demonstrate how the social, political and cultural context of the home and host countries affect migrants' experiences of departure and the work of reintegration.

This thesis takes a cue from Cerase's contextualised lens, drawing upon his notion of the 'return of failure' in Chapter 7 to illustrate how structural determinants can impact the migrant's psychological frame of mind, resulting in the returnee experiencing emotions such as humiliation or frustration, due to bias or prejudice in the receiving society. Chapter 4, meanwhile, utilises the Cerasean concept of the 'return of innovation' to probe elite civic activism, and prioritise a dynamic understanding of return in terms of returnees' agency to be creative in life and work choices, and their readiness to make a positive social impact in the home society.

Adopting a contextualised approach to migrants' lived realities also seems a fitting way to make room in this research for the complex slippages between expectations and reality at the micro-level. It has been noted that migrants may return with the expectation that fitting in will be easy, into a place and society they expect to be familiar, that relationships have remained unchanged by time (Ahmed, 1999). When those expectations are thwarted, it can lead to discontent and misgivings. Far from being a 'welcoming embrace', the return experience might be one of 'rupture and disillusionment' (Christou and King, 2014), and extended family members in the home society could be 'brothers only in name' (Song 2009). It is this kind of complexity at the micro-level of lived experience that this study hopes to capture, tapping into connecting experiences of self-identification, preconception, and adaptability.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

The previous sections explained how this research aims to help address gaps in the literature around narratives of return and micro-level sociocultural analyses of lived realities. I will now unpack a range of concepts and theories relevant to this research: from terms such as mobility, diaspora, transnationalism, and transience, to theoretical frameworks such as the simultaneity of belonging and aspirations-capabilities frameworks.

i. The Mobility Turn

In recent years, migration literature has largely been influenced by three conceptual frameworks - the mobilities paradigm, diasporic studies, and the transnational approach (King and Christou, 2011, p.452). The 'mobility turn' has been particularly helpful in interrogating traditional assumptions of society as place bound (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000, 2007). Instead, it privileges 'movement, change and placelessness' ((King and Christou, 2011, p.452), de-territorialisation and re- territorialisation over territorialisation (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 2). At the same time, these scholars caution that mobility must not be framed as a grand narrative; instead, mobilities must be interpreted in relation to associated immobilities and anchoring. This augurs well for migration studies which must work with the idea that 'homing' is as important as 'moving' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Blunt, 2007).

ii. Diasporic Studies

The term 'diaspora' traces its etymology back to over two thousand years and is an intrinsic part of world migration history. Studies on the Indian diaspora have traditionally given prominence to the various, sometimes interweaving strands of migration patterns that have taken place at various points in the nation's history. However, in the last two decades, the research focus has moved from theorising about how the word 'diaspora' can be usefully employed to understand the migrants' relationship to the motherland and the receiving society (Oonk, 2007), to centring the inquiry around emerging forms of transnationalism and cultural hybridity (Tölölyan, 2007). It is in its most canonical aspect - the aspiration to return to the diasporic homeland, that 'diaspora' finds the deepest resonance with the transnational approach to return migration; so much so that Faist (2010, p.9) once called the two concepts 'awkward dance partners'.

In the context of the current research, the transnational communities framework seems most apt for a study of migrants' continuing links with their home country (Basch, Schiller and Blanc-Szanton, 1994; Condon, 2005; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003), and the impact of dual belonging on migration decisions. Accordingly in this thesis I draw on the conceptual framework of transnationalism to provide a more explicit analysis of the return migration of diasporic Indians who have led transnational lives experiencing a simultaneity of belonging and identity.

iii. Transnationalism

Given that social spaces can include influences and locations that are not limited to the home and receiving countries, and absorb other sites and societies around the world (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), Levitt and Glick-Schiller advocate a social field approach to migration studies and argue that 'assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites. Instead, we suggest thinking of the transnational migration experience as a kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between host land and transnational connections' (2004, p.1003).

In the United States, immigration scholars initially expected that immigrants would have to forsake their unique cultural customs and homeland ties in order to be accepted - the occasional assertions by immigrants as 'Italian American' or 'Irish American' were viewed as a reflection of ethnic pride that did not merit deeper analysis (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). It was only later, when a transnational perspective was introduced into migration research that it began to be accepted that both first- and second-generation migrants continue to be influenced by the ties to their home country (Basch, Schiller & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). There was recognition, however belated, that social spaces are multi-layered and multi-sited. While the term 'transnationalism' is now deeply embedded in the literature on migration (Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2004), it must be acknowledged that it was first conceptualised by a group of social scientists in the early 1990s (Kearney, 1995; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc- Szanton, 1992), based on their research of the experiences of migrants in the US who originated from countries like Haiti, the East Caribbean, and the Philippines. Transnational migrants are also referred to as 'transmigrants' (Schiller et al., 1992), which refers to their tendency to establish social fields spanning geographic, cultural, and political borders.

With mobility as a distinguishing feature, transnational communities can be established in diverse places outside the country of origin (Wickramasekara, 2010) yet foster and nurture connections to country and kin. Highly advanced forms of travel and communication technologies today ensure a more intense nature of linkages (Foner, 1997; Morawska, 1999; Portes et al., 1999), and these networks fulfil a crucial need for migrants as they enable the channelling of credible information flow and financial resources (Kapur 2001). Experience of space and time becomes 'distantiated' as relationships are maintained across national boundaries, and distant events are communicated instantaneously on television, over the

telephone or through the internet (Zeitlin, 2015). Distances in space and time are 'compressed', accelerating connection, communication, conflict interaction and change (Harvey, 1989).

This study takes the view that a focus on transnational links and connections, and the diverse set of belongings and identities that are derived from it, can result in a better diasporic understanding, that in turn can 'challenge the fixity of identity invoked by ethnicity' (Kalra et al., 2005, p.16). Thus, transnationalism enables a conceptualisation of the way migrants (and others) are embedded in more than one society simultaneously. A transnational framework facilitates an understanding of the key variables that could direct the flow of return migration, as well as impact the outcome of return. These variables include the structural environment, varying notions of 'home' and 'belonging' that the migrants hold, and the influence of continuing transnational connections. Moreover, it problematizes the assumption that homeland ties will gradually grow dim and eventually cease to matter.

The research therefore applies a transnational lens on the fluid social spaces migrants inhabit, that are constantly re-forming because of their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Pries, 2005; Smith, 2005). Adopting this framework is also beneficial because it draws into the light the complexities and ecologies emerging from the migration experience - the many linkages that flourish through cross-border travel, virtual communication channels, financial transactions like remittances (Singh, Robertson & Cabraal, 2012), and the manner in which practices such as frequent return visits to the country of ancestral birth sustain community and identity (Baldassar, 2001).

However, despite all the work in transnational studies, there is a lacuna in the current research on transnationalism regarding the impact of the transnational self on resettlement after return migration. The data in my study indicates that the transnational story does not end with return to the country of origin; rather, it suggests that transnational ways of being can alter the inner sense of self for the migrant, leading to a hybridity of identity. This study therefore addresses this gap and investigates the ways in which transmigrants reflexively interpret their own experiences and construct their identities; it also explores their subjective and affective responses to resettlement in the home country.

iv. Simultaneity of Belonging

A close exploration of migrants' cross-border ties reveals the loosening of structural constraints and the transcending of geographical barriers. The networks they form and sustain undermine the hegemony of state borders (Rios & Adiv, 2010). Contradicting the premise that individuals can't be in two or more places at once (Jenkins, 2002), migrants can integrate with the host country, even as they actively maintain transnational connections to the country of origin; these bonds can reinforce one another (Kunuroglu, 2016; Morawska, 2003; Portes et al., 2007; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2003). Additionally, the access to dual citizenship and dual nationality in many countries has led to what Sassen (1998) calls a 'portability of national identity', which allows the migrant to claim membership in more than one setting. Thus, transnational actors may not feel solely attached to the geographical place where they are physically located (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Portes, 2001). Multiple identities are possible - 'flexible' (Ong, 1999), 'post-national' (Soysal, 1994), 'diasporic' (Laguerre, 1998) or 'transnational' (Baubock, 1994) frameworks of citizenship.

The lack of an exclusive affiliation to any one place suggests that transnational actors have the capacity to hold multiple identities, even a 'global' identity. Upadhyay (2013) refers to 'global Indians' and an emerging 'global Indian' form of citizenship and identity, endorsed and promoted by the Indian government to bring overseas Indians within the larger fold of the national community. Here 'global' is used as a symbol of modernity and progress, and return narratives are imbued with a patriotic hue. However, the fluidity of transition across multiple social spaces has consequences for migrant identity. As transnational actors, they pull multiple threads together in order to construct and project a self-perceived identity, making it impossible for them to retain singular affiliations or invoke one predominant identity (Skrbiš, 2008). The transnational spaces they inhabit leads them to experience a simultaneity of identity. This can be understood as the reconciliation of dialectically experienced notions of belonging.

Consequently, even after returning to the home society, the Indian migrant may continue to hold on to his foreign citizenship, while reconnecting with the land that he or she grew up in, and acquiring an OCI Card. While persons of Indian origin are not legally permitted to claim dual citizenship under the Indian Citizenship Act, those who are of Indian Origin and have acquired citizenship of a foreign country, are granted the status of 'Overseas Citizenship of India' (OCI),

offering a form of quasi-citizenship for Indian-origin foreign nationals.

Accordingly, in this study, I draw on the concept of ‘simultaneity’ to highlight the interconnectedness of transnational practices and notions of dual belonging held by migrants (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). The concept is invaluable in unpacking the migrant’s process of identity formation. Simultaneity is understood as ‘living lives that incorporate daily activities, routines, and institutions located both in a destination country and transnationally’ (ibid., p. 1003). This framework helps decipher a state of being, wherein transnational migrants find themselves simultaneously attached to both places at the same time – destination country as well as the country of origin, while reinforcing that these are not contradictory social processes (ibid., p.1003). It also helps to underscore the fragility of conceptual binaries that mark studies of migration and mobility.

v. Transience

My pilot study revealed that almost all the interviewees in my study have retained their international passports, which ensures that the door is left open for any future move. This revelation deepened my curiosity about the types of returnees theorised to be ‘transient migrants’ who see their temporality not as a disruption but rather part of their evolving life course (Gomes, 2019). Such returnees have been conceptualised as those who are conscious of their transient status, such that they embrace uncertainty as a sign of their freedom to make choices, as a reassuring symbol of their unrestricted mobility (Gomes, 2019). Here, transience is perceived as empowering, as a positive asset, that enables the migrant with ample socio-economic capital and transferable skills to adapt to a new receiving society with relative ease. Transience is thus a valuable conceptual lens that provides a nuanced understanding of the ‘unevenness of the migrant(ion) journey’, going beyond categories such as temporary or permanent, to pick out strands of diversity of experience within the migration-mobility experience (Gomes, 2019, p.2,3). My study draws attention to how the migrant navigates the global terrain and practices a ‘moving-between - between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, environments, as a dialectic between movement and fixity’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998, p.33).

vi. The ‘Aspirations Capabilities Framework’

Return migration has been conceptualised as ‘a partial return to a place where the migrant once lived’ (Akesson and Baaz, 2015, p.10). A useful way to understand return migration is not to reduce it to an automated response to a set of functionalist push-pull factors. Instead of seeing migrants as social actors who are trying to maximise ‘utility’, de Haas advocates the adoption of what he calls the ‘aspirations capabilities framework’ (2021, p.2) to conceptualise migration. He applies Amartya Sen’s (1999) capabilities framework to migration to define ‘human mobility as people’s capability (freedom) to choose where to live – including the option to stay’. Here, migration is envisioned as an output of ‘the migrant’s capabilities as well as aspirations to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures’ (ibid., p.1).

The ‘aspirations capabilities framework’ is particularly apt for this study, helping me to situate the analysis of the return of Indian professional migrants to their country of origin within its conceptual arc. The aspirations of a diasporic community longing to find home again come to fruition only because they happen to possess the capability to do so. In order to move, the individual, with or without the family, must possess social capital, human capital, financial capital and physical capability to embark on migration (De Haas, 2021, p.13).

As highly skilled migrants, the participants in this study carry the requisite socio- economic capital, the skillset, and both propensity and opportunity for mobility. Even when migration or return migration is a collective decision by the household, it is primarily a response to ‘aspirations and opportunities, as well as community and resources - whether real or imagined’ (Cohen and Sirkeci, 2021, p.1). Resources matter. They help negotiate outcomes based on the migrants’ wealth, education, experiences and connections (Barglowski, 2019; Cederberg and

Villares-Varela, 2019; Conway and Cohen, 2002; Kofman, 2018). At the centre of it, return migration can be understood as a social process bringing together the instrumental and the affective dimensions of human mobility. The chapters that follow will explore the aspirations of the returning migrants that straddle the dual imaginaries of the rootedness of the homeland and the mythologised rootlessness of mobility.

Chapter 3

Methodology: Mapping the Route

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have introduced the central foci of this thesis and reviewed the literature on return migration that provides an underpinning for the research. This chapter presents the methodological route adopted in this study to gather and analyse data pertaining to my research questions centred around return migration to India, the returnees' notions of identity and belonging set within the context of resettlement. Since 'method is not technical, but purposeful' (Su, Nixon & Adamson, 2010, p.93), I aimed to ensure a tight fit between the research design and the research questions. I have drawn on Yardley's (2000) framework of four principles for 'quality' in qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. I summarise my methodology below (Table 1).

Approach	Qualitative; Thematic Analysis
Ontological Position	Relativist
Epistemological Position	Interpretivist
Data Collection and Analysis	Semi-structured interviews; field notes
Participants	24

Table 1: Summary of methodology

Ontology and Epistemology

Previously, Chapter 2 flagged the dearth of in-depth qualitative analysis of highly skilled Indian returnees' social and cultural experiences, and subjectivities. My study aims to help fill this gap. Hence, a positivist paradigm seems unsuitable, because positivist research views data as objectively verifiable and reality as characterised by a fixed, singular truth, and therefore capable of being conclusively measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). By contrast, my focus on the unruly, unpredictable, and even contradictory emotions and experiences of return necessitated an understanding of participants' life worlds as complex and multi-faceted. Ontologically, therefore, I chose a relativist stance in keeping with the innately subjective nature of my participants' lived experiences (Guba, 1990). Epistemologically, I move away from positivist notions of measurable truths, and adopt an interpretivist paradigm, one which explores 'how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009, p.5).

Aside from helping to address the scarcity of qualitative research on Indian returnees and their resettlement experiences, I also chose a qualitative interpretivist paradigm in order to become more self-aware and reflective, and thereby fulfil Yardley's (2000) criterion of transparency. Being reflexive means remaining alert to 'the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 8). Self-awareness can strengthen the trustworthiness of the research, as I detail in the 'Reflexivity and Positionality' section on my insider-outsider positionality as a person sharing the same nationality, religion, and gender, with most of my participants.

A qualitative interpretivist paradigm carries certain limitations. For one, given my small sample size of 24 participants and a commitment to multiple, even contradictory realities rather than a fixed, observable, and objective truth, the study cannot be said to have the strengths of large-scale positivist research, such as high generalisability, reliability, and validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009, p. 220). Both data-gathering and analysis are influenced by the researcher's positionality and unique individual choices - the questions I formulate, the rapport building with my interviewees, and my own interpretation and analysis of the information. A qualitative study can therefore be criticised as being too 'impressionistic' or 'subjective' (Bryman, 2012, p. 405).

I will therefore strive to remain ‘humble and modest’ about my knowledge claims, acknowledging that my interpretations are ‘partial and situated’ (Walker & Thomson, 2010, p. 27). However, this does not undermine the *quality* of qualitative research. From a reflexive lens, as I later elaborate, ‘no method is in and of itself neutral or objective’ (Phipps, 2013, p. 23). Rather, in line with Yardley’s (2000) criterion of ‘impact and importance’, this research seeks to offer insights about Indian returnees’ social, cultural and affective life worlds and thereby make a distinctive contribution to migration literature that has scarcely explored their thoughts, feelings and lived experiences. Instead of treating the lack of objective truth as a weakness, this study considers its ontological commitment to plural realities a strength, as the latter can produce critical analysis of how participants construct their subjective representations of reality. Thus, an interpretivist qualitative research design seems helpful to understand the lived experiences and mobility patterns of this growing community of highly mobile transmigrants in their spaces of resettlement.

Sample

This study’s participants are highly skilled migrants who were leading transnational lives prior to return and continue to retain vestiges of their transnational identities and practices after returning to the home society. Accordingly, the participants are drawn from the upwardly mobile, upper classes in India, who left India either for higher studies, or to pursue job opportunities in the host country. They continued to live and work there for at least ten years, before choosing to return to India with global work experience. More specifically, these returnees are highly skilled, highly paid professionals whose hypermobility is linked to professional growth, or who circulate within and between transnational corporations as intra-company transferees (Liu, 2018); a positioning that can also lead them to be viewed as ‘managerial elites’ (Castells, 2011). While the meanings of the term ‘elite’ can be multiple, ambiguous and cross-culturally dependent (Mikecz, 2012) the population in this study can be viewed as ‘elites’ by virtue of them possessing a significant amount of economic and social capital and their ‘ability to exert influence’ through ‘social networks, social capital and strategic position within social structures’ (Harvey, 2011, p.433)

I utilised a four-phased approach to design and recruit my sample.

Phase 1

Firstly, to develop contextualised knowledge about my sample, I reviewed peer-reviewed literature published within the last 10 years on the phenomenon of return migration to India (e.g. Biswas, 2014; Tejada et al, 2014). I also reviewed literature on specific dimensions of this phenomenon that could help me understand returnee demographics and design a representative sample. For example, several studies revealed that the professions of elite Indian returnees tend to be concentrated within technology, engineering and business (Zagade & Desai, 2017; Qin, 2014). This helped shed light on the types of occupational backgrounds commonly possessed by elite returnees, offering me contextual knowledge about gathering a reasonably representative sample within the confines of a small-scale qualitative study (Bryman, 2012). I also reviewed grey literature in the form of press reports on returning NRIs and data available on migration portals.

Phase 2

Moving into the hands-on phase of sample design, I utilised purposive sampling, which aims to strategically select participants particularly knowledgeable and experienced about the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2012); a type of a population also referred to as 'a judgmental or expert sample' (Battaglia, 2008, p. 645-47). As a tool to ensure the broader goal of purposive sampling, I employed the stratification method of dividing the target- population into sub-categories and thereby developing a list of predetermined criteria for sample recruitment (Bryman, 2012). My protocol consisted of six criteria - educational attainment, age, skill level, gender, the receiving country, and the number of years spent in the receiving country prior to return. This helped to design a sample who could logically be said to represent the highly skilled return migrant population under study. Although I use the somewhat positivist term 'sample', my emphasis is not on the numbers being tested but on the richness of data. In line with an interpretivist, relativist qualitative research paradigm, which values in-depth attention to individual meaning-making and subjective lived realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), I decided to recruit a small sample to allow for both thick description and thick interpretation (Denzin, 1989).

Phase 3

I integrated the sample recruitment tools explained previously to conduct an in-depth pilot study with 7 participants. Lessons learnt in the field at the pilot study stage included the difficulties of locating and accessing elites, and the challenges of navigating the physical locations that are set largely on the outskirts of the city. As detailed more fully in Phase 4, these experiences were helpful in preparing for the practicalities of the extended fieldwork for this thesis, which was to span 11 months with intermittent breaks.

The pilot study also refined my approach to sample recruitment. Accessing female migrants was more feasible than accessing male migrants due to a range of factors, including the latter's greater likelihood of being employed in professions with long work hours, frequent overseas travel, and little capacity for being interviewed; female migrant-spouses' greater likelihood of being home-based. These circumstances made it more feasible to build relationships of trust and rapport with female participants. While the relative lack of access to male participants initially appeared to be a limitation, the pilot study made it clear that the women migrants had a crucial role to play in migration decision-making as well as in processes of settlement in the receiving country and resettlement once back in the home society.

Some of these women are migrant professionals in their own right, and others have adopted the role of 'trailing spouses' - a term that refers to the spouse or individual following in the tracks of or accompanying their partner who is an internationally mobile professional (Cangi'a, 2017; Callan and Ardener 1984; Walsh 2007). The pilot study gave early indications of the rich data provided by the 'trailing spouses': women-participants who had to reinvent their professional selves or quit their jobs upon returning to India while performing most of the family duties. They had weighed their professional lives in balance with their personal family lives and reached a compromise. Their narratives of migration and return migration revealed how the support of the trailing spouse is critical to the success of migration and settlement for the whole family, and also shed light on the trailing spouse's meaning-making on intrapersonal, familial, and societal levels.

These insights from the pilot study compelled me to adapt my sample recruitment protocol and embrace the way my sample became majority-female. Foregrounding women's voices led me to include questions on the gendered dimension to resettlement in India, and the ways in which women returnees navigated the constraints of patriarchy and designed a sense of self.

Thus, I sought to turn what initially seemed to be a hurdle in my sample design (male participants' lack of availability) into an analytical opportunity to enrich the data. In doing so, I followed the principle that flexibility and openness is key to rich research (Bryman, 2012; Lincoln & Denzin, 2017).

Phase 4

Building on lessons from my pilot study, I set out to recruit the full final sample and begin fieldwork. The task of identifying elite participants, then locating them geographically, and finally gaining access has been acknowledged by many other researchers as both challenging, and time-consuming (Mikesz, 2012; Ostrander, 1995). Though preliminary research had established that the returnees in this study lived in gated communities in Bangalore, it was difficult to locate them, and even more challenging to find gatekeepers who would act as intermediaries and vouch for my credibility as a researcher. Gaining access to these fortified cocoons involved strategy and perseverance. Eventually, I made a list of the prominent gated communities and scoured both grey literature and the sparse scholarly material on return migration to India to find names or possible leads. I decided to use the snowball sampling technique, wherein existing participants refer the researcher to other participants they know, as this technique can prove useful for hard-to-reach populations (Bryman, 2012). I reached out to professional contacts or friendly sources in the cities of Mumbai and Bangalore asking them to recommend or connect me to persons who might meet the criteria for the study, and through them, found links to similar others.

A series of calls over a couple of months gave me my first opening - the female administrative head of an aerospace start-up company headquartered in Bangalore, is resident at a large gated complex in Whitefield called Belle Green Paradise*. A successful meeting followed, where I conveyed the purpose of the study and established my credentials by providing details of my professional and academic work, besides sharing a summary of the research objectives of my project. This resulted in a concerted chain- referral exercise that eventually yielded four couples within the same complex. This was to lead to more connections at a couple of neighbouring gated complexes.

Pursuing another lead, I reached out to the heads of a few international schools in Bangalore. Some of the leading newspapers in south India had carried stories about the mushrooming of

‘international’ schools in the city in response to the return of NRIs and their desire for schools that had adopted the international model of education. Assuming that the odds of gaining access to the people in power would be higher if the researcher follows protocol and writes explanatory emails clearly detailing the research purpose and agenda (Bryman, 2012), I emailed the school authorities seeking their assistance in locating participants for the study. Out of the four schools I approached in this manner, one replied with a positive response. I then ensured that professional courtesies were observed and used both email and telephone channels to confirm the time and day for an interview.

Subsequently, this head of school connected me to two sets of parents at her school who had spent several years in the US before returning to India and whose children were studying at the said school. Initial interviews catalysed other interviews with similar returnees living in gated communities, with the first set of parents acting as mediators; an example of what Esra Bakkalbasioglu calls the ‘interviewee-as-fixer’ strategy (2020, p.689). Employing this strategy enabled ‘faster access and partial insiderness to their elite research group’ (ibid.,p.693). The advantage of a referral by friends is that respondents are more willing to give one time for the meetings. This was a significant gain, as normally elite interviewees are less willing to respond to emails or calls from an outsider; they are far more responsive to requests from personal connections (Mikecz, 2012). Snowball sampling thus enabled a chain of responses.

The characteristics of the sample are summarised below (Table 2).

Category	Sample Characteristics
Age	40-50
Nature of migration	First-generation immigrants returning to India after prolonged time in the US and the UK. The majority of participants held citizenship in their previous receiving country.

Education	All the participants were educated to postgraduate-degree level.
Profession	The majority of female participants were married to software engineers or finance professionals, while most of the male participants were IT/software engineers; a few were finance and medical professionals.
Gender	17 female participants 7 male participants

Number of participants	24
Number of local informants interviewed for context	10 (7 female, 3 male)
Duration of fieldwork with sample	11 months (combining home visits, telephone interviews, and online, virtual interviews)

Table 2: Sample Characteristics

A full list of the characteristics of research participants can be found in Appendix 1.

Research Site

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the data has shown that Bangalore is the favoured city of return for migrant professionals (Chacko, 2007; Ilkjaer, 2016; Upadhy, 2013). It appears that many returnees choose luxurious gated complexes or elite apartment complexes as residences, complete with high-end amenities, sprawling tennis courts and open spaces, thus consciously creating idyllic, carefully managed social spaces in the city for social interaction and community-building. This observation led me to choose Bangalore as the site of field research, where interviews were conducted with 24 returnees, at their homes and other personal spaces inside gated communities. 10 other supporting interviews with local informants were conducted in the cities of Mumbai and Bangalore. While the latter are not counted within the main dataset, they were conducted to provide local perspectives on the social, cultural and economic context of the returnees and the changing demographics of the urban area in which they were positioned.

Most gated complexes are set away from the centre of the city, in the south, and south-east of Bangalore in areas like Whitefield, Sarjapur Road. Construction is underway of many more sprawling settlements spreading across other areas like Yelahanka, Salarpuria, and to the outskirts of the city. The participants in this study were mostly located in the suburbs of Whitefield and Begur in south Bangalore.

Accessing the Research Site

The road from the middle-class suburb of Indiranagar to the modern IT hub and upscale neighbourhood of Whitefield in East Bangalore is a winding one, capturing a variegated cityscape marked by socio-economic and spatial inequalities. Stately government buildings, schools, shops and office buildings, and diminishing green spaces flank chaotic streets overflowing with people and vehicles, where the occasional wandering cow vies with Uber auto rickshaws for right of way.

I will now share my experience of travelling to and from the field site through the months of fieldwork. These disclosures not only aim to leave the audit trail crucial to transparency in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000) but also to communicate how the research site became intrinsic to this analysis of return. The spatial contours of the setting, particularly the changing aspects of the cityscape, contributed to my understanding of the lived experience of the returnee moving back from a developed country to a developing country.

The tangle of slums juxtaposed with skyscrapers, unfinished construction sites alongside technology parks, and the shopping malls beside hutments were a reflection of the uneven development that marks Bangalore and other major metropolises of India. The 14- kilometre journey from the city centre to the gated community in Whitefield typically took around 40 minutes, navigating massive traffic gridlocks and potholed roads.

Cab drivers and eateries along the way provided useful nuggets of information about the city's character. Since negotiating fares and routes on each new day proved to be a frustrating exercise (as no single fare system is adhered to), the solution was to hire a driver for long periods of fieldwork. It also provided a measure of safety, as the distances to and from the field site were long and took a few hours a day due to the unmanageable levels of traffic congestion. The driver Venkatesh would talk incessantly about the state of the city through the cacophony of blaring horns: *"The IT culture has changed everything! Gated complexes, skyscrapers - so expensive. Now ordinary people cannot afford to buy flats. Now everything is Western culture. Young people want more and more money. Too many people, all the gardens are gone... Bangalore is not as green as when I was a small boy."*

Driving past the old airport road of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, through Marathahalli, Siddapura, via Varthur Road into the now swanky Whitefield area, the ambience changes to accommodate a plethora of shopping malls, IT Parks, and gated complexes including the sprawling gated complexes where many of the interviewees in this study now live. Once an obscure village turned fledgling suburb, Whitefield found itself catapulted into the limelight in the wake of the 90s IT boom, especially with the establishment of the International Tech Park, Bangalore (more commonly known as ITPL) which is one of India's first information technology parks. Today, this part of Bangalore is replete with gated complexes named extravagantly as Pebble Bay, Golden Enclave, Ozone, Villa Grande, Prestige White Meadows, Zonasha Paradiso, and so on; the nomenclature 'self-consciously evoke(s) American suburbia or European style luxury' (Upadhyay, 2013, p. 219). I thus compiled field notes on these spatial and temporal nuances to achieve a more holistic and contextualised analysis of the returnees' lives.

Qualitative Interviews

Kvale (2007) makes the salient point that interviews are ideal for exploratory qualitative research because they allow the researcher to learn *throughout* the investigation - that is,

novel and unexpected elements of the phenomenon may continually emerge during interviews, and data analysis can be refined accordingly. This analytical flexibility might not have been available to me if I had begun my study with a predetermined hypothesis or closed survey questions. Since this thesis aims at addressing the gap in sociological literature regarding the phenomenon of return migration, and specifically the social and cultural dimensions of return migration to India, I chose to conduct open-ended interviews with the returnees. This decision was also shaped by the awareness that my group of participants could be termed 'elite', which called for appropriate planning and methodological design.

The term 'elite' has more than one connotation - it could mean the social position of the interviewee in society, or just 'the social position relative to the researcher conducting the interview' (Stephens, 2007, p.205) - it shapes the balance of power in the interaction. While scholars have rightly problematised the categorisation of people into dualistic categories such as 'elite' and 'non-elite' (Smith 2006), stating that 'some marginalised groups can be just as hard to penetrate as those in powerful positions' (Taylor, 2004, quoted in Smith, 2006, p.648), it is generally acknowledged that gaining access to elites is not without difficulties, and could well prove difficult to repeat (Mikecz, 2012). Therefore, the time allocated would have to be optimised, and interviews have proved to be the ideal methodological tool for elite research, offering as it does, a degree of intimacy between the researcher and the interviewee (Clark, 1998). Face-to-face contact would allow for a closer observation of nonverbal clues such as intonation, pauses, and emotions.

Telephonic interviews as a method are seen to work well in studies where interviewees are geographically dispersed, or if the group to be covered is a very large one, but would possibly be less effective in establishing the much-needed rapport with the interviewee (Stephens, 2007). One feature of research with elites, is that the participants in focus are considered to be 'in the know', whereas in studies involving non-elites, the researcher is deemed to be the 'expert' (Mikecz, 2012, p.483); elites often lead the conversation and may even stray away from the topic under discussion. It would then fall to the interviewer to refashion the interaction and bring the interviewee back to the point in focus. This can be achieved more easily if a certain rapport has been established at the start between the two, since the time allocated to the data gathering is a limited one. Though the participant in the research by

virtue of being an elite, exerts control over the length of time assigned to the interview, and it will not usually extend beyond the stipulated time, open-ended interviews work well - a form of questioning that could lead to 'unanticipated answers' (Fowler, 1984, p.87).

An ethnographic method like participant observation is considered to be an extremely valuable method in refugee research that seeks to decipher meaning in the context of violence and loss (Omidian and Ahearn, 2000). However, participant observation, which is normally employed over a long stretch across time and space, may not be possible in an elite setting, given the peculiar nature of the setting, and the status of the elite subject. Given that the nature of the interaction with a vulnerable, non-elite group like refugees must be rooted in cultural understanding and empathy, anthropologists lean on participant observation, life-history and case-study construction, and discussion groups (Omidian and Ahearn, 2000) in order to elicit and analyse their stories of trauma, and to describe "social realities from the perspective of the subject, not the observers" (Chadwick, 1984, p.207).

Questionnaires offer another form of investigation, but are time-consuming, and call for a more structured approach with questions crafted in advance rather than being shaped by the context or designed by the confidences spontaneously shared by the respondent. Studies show that both non-elite and elite groups appear to respond better to open-ended rather than closed-ended questions (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, p.674). Elite participants like those in this study, are likely to feel hemmed in, if they have to 'fit themselves into the terms of reference proposed by the researcher (Schoenberger, 1991, p.183), and are not given the freedom to explain their life events in their own voice at their own pace. Qualitative research values the insiders' view - to understand the world as the participant sees it (Bernard, 1988; Spradley, 1979).

Anticipating therefore that semi-structured interviews would allow my interviewees to respond to questions on their own terms far more effectively than structured interviews (Edwards and Holland, 2013), I ensured that structure was kept to a minimum. The goal was to encourage them to produce reflexive narratives about the self and identity, drawing on their personal experiences and understanding of the world (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Narrative interviews are 'interpretive devices through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others' (Lawler, 2002).

In summary, the choice of face-to-face interview methodology in this study helped elicit rich, complex data from the elite sample, aligning with the interpretivist, relativist paradigm of this research in that ‘meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their worlds’ (Merriam and Tisdell, 2002, p.3). Conducting three follow-up interviews with each participant further helped to capture the nuances of post-return settlement.

The Instrument Developed for the Interviews

The interview instrument was designed with the goal of achieving a nuanced account of the dynamics of adjustment and accommodation with the home society. A flexible interview guide was drafted – one that moved across key topics and comprising questions that were biographical, attitudinal, and experience-based. These included broadly, but were not limited to, the participants’ initial migration motives, their lives in the host country, their reasons and preparation for return, their resettlement experiences upon return, the role of transnational networks in their decision-making, and their plans and aspirations for their future. The sub-questions that were woven into the main line of inquiry sought to understand the day-to-day experiences of settlement, with regard to running the house, schooling dilemmas, employment for the trailing spouses, social interaction, the domestic helpers and service providers, and their own comparative views on the quality of life in India versus the lives they had led prior to return.

Resettlement experiences were deciphered through the eyes of the interviewee; an empathetic stance which coheres with the interpretivist focus on multiple and subjective lived realities (Bryman, 2012). A semi-structured format allows participants to diverge from the questions asked or pursue additional unanticipated lines of thought; it ensures freedom and flexibility (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). Therefore, a descriptive-type approach to questioning was adopted - broad, open ‘grand tours’ (Spradley, 1979) which runs on the lines of ‘tell me about your experience of’, ‘what was it like being’, and so on.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted individually with each participant. The setting was chosen by the participants in this study who suggested that the interview was conducted either at their homes or at their private Club inside the gated community. The interview site can hold the key to deciphering how the interviewee constructs self-identity (Sin, 2003). Handing over

the choice of the interview site to the interviewee was an implicit acknowledgement that the interviewee had important knowledge to contribute to the research; it cast the interviewee in a 'position of authority' (Liu, 2018, p.4). Visiting the participants at their homes inside the gated communities offered me the opportunity to observe their lifestyle from an emic perspective. In this manner, I arranged interviews for the first round of fieldwork, and later, the second follow-up sessions, both in person, on the telephone, and on virtual platforms. The goal was to "attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view and unfold the meaning of their lived world" (Kvale, 2007, p. 481), reported in their own words.

The first set of interviews were scheduled at the gated complex Chaitanya Smaran, located in the Whitefield area of Krishnarajapuram, at the junction of Old Madras Road and Outer Ring Road. One leaves the main city area behind as the road turns eastward, though the bumper-to-bumper traffic snarls continue. The transition from busy commercial streets and potholed roads with stray tea-stalls, piles of garbage, and a cluster of hutments by the side of the road, into a perfectly designed, and fortified residential complex with manicured lawns was unsettling at first. Once I got past the security guards who telephoned the person I was to meet, got the required permission, checked my ID proof, and waved me in, the pristine setting and luxuriant ambience of the complex set the tone for the discussions that I was to have over many days. Meetings were conducted at either their villas, or at the ubiquitous Clubhouse, a prominent showpiece at all the gated complexes in the city.

I made detailed field notes about the physical contours of their habitat, the manner in which the spatiality of the home impacted the returnees' everyday lives, the patronising of spaces such as the gated community's own Club and gyms. Phipps and Kay (2014, p. 279) problematise 'the privileging of the 'transcript' and 'audio recording' as pre-eminent and rarely questioned forms of data collection', pointing out that the study of migration can take many forms and include visual and aesthetic mediums to capture different affective and relational dimensions of migration. Heeding the need for imaginative and multi-modal tools of inquiry to capture these 'aesthetic, affective, situational and liminal layers' (Phipps & Kay, 2014, p. 283), I took note of the visual artefacts in many of the homes that included an interesting mix of Indian objet d'art and craft items, and ceramics, figurines, and maquettes from different parts of the world, picked on their migratory journeys. There were also framed

photographs sprinkled around in the house that featured snapshots of life in the receiving society, as well as those of life in India. Artefacts placed around the home can also provide spaces of enquiry, on the premise that ‘the interviewee’s own environment provides important clues, which can be particularly significant in high-context cultures’ (Mikecz, 2012). Life history material used for symbolic construction of identity can reveal how the actors represent themselves (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This method also synergised with the research objective of exploring notions of identity and belonging, which can be ‘experienced as well as evoked in particular spaces and places, affecting the way in which participants respond’ (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

The home space was clearly a comfortable one for the interviewees, one which they had personalised, and where they were in control of their spatiality. One of the participants in this study, Shilpita, insisted on my coming to her villa for the interview around mid- morning, after her spouse had left for work, and when there were domestic helpers around to take care of the cleaning and cooking chores. Her ease was evident in the way she showed me all around the house, including her big art room where she spent a few hours painting each day. Along with other details about her life in the US and other countries, before returning to India, she also referred to the helpers:

“Here we are glad to have helpers no doubt, but still the way we treat our helpers is very different from the way they are treated by the locals, or even by my relatives in Delhi. We pay well because we want her to earn enough to sustain her family. We pay on the basis of how much we should pay, not on the basis of how much she should make...If you look at how stingy they are, the local Kannadigas, when they pay their maids! Maybe just 3000 or less a month then the poor woman must work in 4 houses to make enough money. Here I have one person dedicated to my house. And I pay what she would make from 4 houses...”

Interviewer: *“And how many helpers do you have?”*

Shilpita: *“Two cooks, one cleaning person, one driver, and a gardener”.*

Excerpts from narratives such as this one above, were evocative and illustrative. The presence of the helpers led Shilpita to provide, albeit inadvertently, glimpses of their mutual dependence as also the socio-structural inequalities in their relationship. Statements like the above also threw light on her perceptions of the ‘locals’, the setting apart of the ‘other’ from self. Thus, ‘meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production, involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge’ (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p.62).

The spatial context of the interviews, in this case, the gated complexes and high-rise apartments, served to underscore returnees' status as an elite community. I hold back from providing excessive detail about the various gated complexes that I visited, as 'descriptive excess' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, pp.164–5) can prove counterproductive. However, some of the details are relevant in that they provide a contextual understanding of social behaviour (Bryman, 2012). Thus, in chapter 5 titled *Gated Communities: Living in a Bubble*, I describe the luxuriant layout of a gated complex including elaborate security arrangements that restrict public access and effectively shut out the world beyond the gates, the vast open spaces and private American-style gardens, the sidewalks with kids on rollerblades, the Club, and the overall sense of a bubble-like existence, that is in contrast to the spatial and socio-economic realities outside the gates of the complex. The 'products' of sociological interviewing cannot be divorced from the circumstantial detail of their production' (Hester and Francis, 1994, p.679).

Aware that other actors and stakeholders in the social surroundings might impact migrants' well-being in the process of return (Vathi and King, 2015), the interviews probed, empathetically, the interactions that they had with people in their extended family, friends' network, and their fellow residents inside the gated community, as also the ways in which they connected (or did not) with the locals in the city. I observed the multitude of helpers in the domestic sphere, the casual references in conversation to frequent trips made to previous receiving countries like the US, and the tenor of life in the city outside the world of the gated community. Reconstructing their life history trajectories in consonance with their own narratives helped to unpack the motivations for mobility, as also migration experiences in changing social environments.

Interview Questions

Across all the interview sessions, I would open the interviews with general questions (Healey and Rawlinson, 1993), and with some of the participants, I nudged them into recounting their journey in their own words. Studies have also indicated that starting off with broad questions about their background can be beneficial (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). I thus framed the questions in an open-ended manner and returned to subjects that were not probed in depth, in a roundabout way, in the repeat interviews. This gave me the time to gradually build up trust in the relationship without dominating the interview. It was a balancing act, since I also had to ensure that the interview was not driven by the 'interviewee's agenda' (Ezzy, 2010).

I also used the tool of silence at times, when an interviewee had finished addressing a question, and we let a comfortable silence take over for a few minutes, perhaps even take a sip of tea, before moving to the next question. There were times when I allowed silence to paper over an element of disquiet that had crept into the atmosphere, such as when one participant Ameera talked about her perceptions of being 'othered' in shops in the US, as a 'brown woman' who the shopkeeper may have considered was 'unable to pay' and may have seemed distrustful of her. Silence can be an effective probe when used sparingly (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

Questions were interspersed with a nodding of the head, a smile, or a few prompts such as 'Oh, I see', or 'Oh, and?' or 'Tell me more', or an occasional echo of the last part of the participant's sentence so as to prompt a fuller, more drawn-out answer (Bernard, 2000). I sought to elicit lengthy descriptions on the actual day-to-day experiences of settlement, including details on housing and schooling, employment, social interaction, service providers, and security services.

Even though I expected that most of the interview sessions would be in English, I was prepared for the use of vernacular languages such as Hindi, Tamil or Malayalam, (Kannada is the state language, but it is one that I do not have knowledge of). The participants occasionally used vernacular phrases in the interaction - these were incorporated in the final write-up, as it carries authentic expression, and needed to be understood in the light of informal conversation. In the event of the interviewee evincing a desire to communicate in his or her native language such as Kannada or Telugu, I was prepared to work with a translator; however, the need did not arise, as all the interviewees were highly educated individuals, with ample global exposure and more than a degree of comfort with English as the language of communication.

Fieldwork Challenges

Anxiety during fieldwork is not uncommon. In the context of this study, fieldwork was not always a smooth process. Overcoming the barriers that are usually erected by the elites themselves takes a great deal of negotiation (Shenton & Hayter, 2004; Welch et al., 2002). An example of these barriers would be the reluctance of elite participants to travel to an interview or adapt to the researcher's schedule (Conti & O'Neil, 2007; Stephens, 2007). This meant that the onus of being flexible and readjusting interview schedules was entirely placed on the interviewer, in this case, me. This involved a greater investment of time, cost, and effort that it would have with other kinds

of interviewees. Problems arose in gaining access to the participants; some of those interviews that were fixed after a period of negotiation, had to be rescheduled, or even cancelled, as a result of the interviewee changing his or her mind about doing the interview.

While the selection of the participants was carefully done, referring back to the sampling criteria, all of the interviews can be termed as 'elite interviews'; one of the negative aspects to this was that I could not expect them to meet me at an external location. The interview site and time were fixed according to their convenience and were liable to be changed if they saw fit to do so. There were also structural constraints like the long distances that one needed to travel in order to reach the gated complex. Safety was another concern given the gendered nature of the fieldwork experience. The long drives back late in the evening, into the main city area of Bangalore where I had set up temporary residence, often passed through isolated stretches as the driver wished to avoid traffic pileups. This caused me some unease. However, careful planning and liaising with friends as well as gatekeepers provided a net of security.

Joint Interviewing

One of the limitations in conducting household research is that the wife is often considered the spokesperson on 'family' matters (Valentine, 1999). Joint interviews with husband and wife were difficult to organise because of the practical problems of finding a mutually convenient time when all three of us could be present. Though the interviews were requested a week, sometimes two weeks in advance of the meeting, very few joint interviews took place. Therefore, most of the interviews were conducted individually, even while interviewing members of the same family, such as husband and wife. The setting thus established was one of more privacy and confidentiality than one conducting joint interviews (Valentine, 1999). Another advantage of the single interview was that it allowed for a closer study of individual perceptions and attitudes, while also noting the interrelation between opinions expressed by each spouse (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010).

However, with two of the couples, it was possible to conduct a joint interview with the husband and wife on more than one occasion. Evidently, during a joint interview session, couples tend to corroborate each other's stories, and 'a process of negotiation and mediation takes place between couples in the production of a single collaborative account for the interviewer' (Valentine, 1999, p.68). Joint interviews can also be useful to gain an overview of events, besides generating a wealth of observational data (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014).

I provide an example of a joint interview, or a couple interview, conducted for this study; the extract below demonstrates the synchronic quality of their responses:

Interviewer: *Did you have a lot of friends there?*

Nagesh: *Not many. It was a Caucasian dominated area, so just a Hi-Bye kind of a thing... But about 5 kms away there was a larger Indian community. We are so socially connected with others in India, unlike in the West. See, integration they say, but depends... to what level? Typical Americans, black or white – I found it is always at an external level – Hi! How are you? How are you doing...that's all. It never goes beyond that. It's not like you can walk into their houses just like that - their whole social construct is very different.*

Maya: *My way of saying it is that it is very plastic over there.*

Nagesh: *For example, Maya offered you tea and snacks right – no drama about it, you take it naturally, we give it naturally. It is part of our culture, when a guest comes. And it is in your culture too that you won't refuse because you feel that it would hurt us by refusing.*

Interviewer: *Yes, it's a warm gesture on your part.*

Nagesh: *Very spontaneous, the way we act. Say, we are meeting in the morning - you will ask, 'naashta ho gaya kya?'* But in the US, it will be a casual enquiry about the weather. It's never 'have you had your breakfast?' When I meet a Caucasian, I think so many times – should I offer tea or not? Should I add sugar? A slice of cake with it? Here Maya didn't even ask you...*

Maya: *I just gave it to you.*

Nagesh: *Over there, so much thinking to do beforehand.*

Maya: *People there are very uptight, but I am very open.*

{ *naashta ho gaya kya? - have you had breakfast?}

Interactions like these can reveal the pattern of communication between the spouses (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). There were several important points being made about social interaction and perceived cultural differences in this account above that I have analysed in some detail in the chapters that follow - the awareness of being 'Indian' and the other 'Caucasian', the assertion that their own 'Indian' culture made them behave in a certain way, the implied criticism of a foreign culture as being more impersonal - all of it offered insights into notions of belonging and difference. What was notable too, was that the sharing of experiences and their own reading of those experiences, was rendered smoother by their mutual recollection and affirmation.

A follow-up round of interviews was conducted midway through the next year when the pandemic was already underway. Due to the constraints on travel, these were carried out

virtually on platforms like Skype and Zoom. There was a measure of diffidence about Skype interaction, given that face-to-face interviewing is still considered the ‘gold standard’ in qualitative interviewing (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006); and the fact that many scholars view interviewing on Skype as a second-class approach (Jackson, 2021, p.111). However, my own experience as a virtual interviewer confirmed that virtual interviews offer both flexibility and accessibility for the researcher as well as the participant (Cater, 2011; Iacono et al., 2016).

Admittedly, virtual meetings do impact the opportunity to pick up on non-verbal views, besides having a negative effect on the time spent together for it is pre-determined and fixed. Technological glitches also occasionally interrupt the flow of talk. However, these flaws are offset by the fact that the internet is a ubiquitous presence in everyday interaction all over the globe, web technologies have opened new vistas of opportunities for researchers (Hamilton, 2014), and above all, the people in this study are highly skilled professionals and transnational migrants who were already very adept at using web technology. Besides, these were repeat rounds of meetings, and I was able to build on the warm connections already established in the first round.

Also invaluable were the short and sometimes long conversations that I had with taxi drivers and autorickshaw drivers who spoke frankly and expressively about the state of the city, their perceptions of the ‘NRI’*, the people who live in *“those showy, grand gated complexes”*, and the unfair allocation of public resources like water and electricity to gated complexes. These random conversations helped enormously in visualising the ways in which the city itself had changed in response to the return of these migrants, reorienting itself to meet the material expectations of the returnees, allowing selective metamorphosis of its physicality and perhaps, inadvertently, facilitating the formation of parallel worlds within itself.

{*NRI - Non-Resident Indian}

Besides, I conducted 10 other short, supporting interviews conducted with some of the helpers at my interviewees’ homes, people at the little eateries lining Bangalore city’s crowded streets where I often had my meals, the security guards at the gates of the gated community when I exited and had to wait for my transport to arrive. I noted the frequent use of the term ‘namma Bengaluru’ - a phrase that literally translates into ‘our Bangalore’ and is marked by both cynicism and genuine proprietary pride; it crops up regularly in freewheeling discussions about

unfinished road repair projects, the corrupt officials, the plethora of shrines, and the “*best weather*” of Bangalore, “*better than any other spot in India*”.

Reflexivity and Positionality

A seminal definition of reflexivity comes from Kim Etherington (2004), who defines reflexivity as an “ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understandings” (p.19). A long tradition of social science research demonstrates how reflexivity has become well-established as an ethical and methodological imperative (Finlay, 2002; Fook, 1999). I also draw on more recent scholarship to reflect on how reflexivity demands close attention to the researcher’s identity and positionality in relation to the research, and their internal, affective, and social responses to participant narratives (Folkes, 2022; Wiant Cummins and Brannon, 2022). By positionality, I refer to ‘how researchers explore their situatedness and their multiple and shifting identities and how these identities inform research processes’ (Njeri, 2021, p.386).

I used a reflexivity journal to make these reflections systematically and iteratively throughout all phases of the research cycle, from data generation to analysis - the type of reflexivity that Finlay (2002) calls ‘negotiating the swamp’ or wading through ‘muddy ambiguity and multiple trails’ as I reflected on my positionality and relationship with my participants (p. 209). I was keenly aware that while I could not avoid bringing my knowledgeability and positionality to the research, I had to reflect transparently on predetermined attitudes or biases (Mikecz, 2012). ‘Knowledgeability’ here implies an understanding of the interviewees’ backgrounds and preferences, such as their mobility pathways and professional trajectories (Mikecz, 2012). Given that I had a similar upbringing in India in terms of ethnicity, religion, and gender, I was familiar with some of their aspirations and cultural values. In line with Yardley’s (2000) criterion of transparency in good qualitative research, I journaled about moments where I felt concerned about whether those factors could impact the non-partisan nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

For example, I noted that some of the interviewees’ narration of the homesickness they experienced whilst living in the receiving society elicited an involuntary reciprocal response from me. When the conversation turned to the pull of the homeland, I had to hold back from narrating my own experience of loneliness in new surroundings in a foreign country, aware that such a form of tacit encouragement might colour the interviewee’s own account. I was also

concerned that expressing emotion might be a form of exploiting the participant (Edwards and Holland, 2013). I aimed to guard against any predetermined attitudes or assumptions that my positionality could bring to the research. While complete objectivity is not a realistic goal, I endeavoured to navigate problems of reactivity as evenly and neutrally as possible, by exercising self-awareness.

Yet, I do not endorse McCracken's (1988) recommendation to avoid 'over-rapport' in interviews by 'manufacture(ing) distance'. On the contrary, displaying vulnerability or sharing experiences that resonate with the participant's own experience, could lead to a more empathetic emotional setting. The informality could put them at ease, besides gently indicating that the control of the conversation would be shared between the interviewer and the interviewee. As Douglas Ezzy suggests, 'The act of interviewing can be felt as communion rather than conquest' (2010, p.164). This notion of 'communion over conquest' seems particularly important when we consider, as Phipps (2013) notes, the potentially extractive and 'data mining' approach that standardised methods may adopt. I therefore favoured an interdependent, relational approach to interviewing (Benjamin, 1988).

I also reflected on whether by not reacting sufficiently emotionally to their emotional sharing, would I not be diminishing the sense that I understood the participant's state of mind, that I could relate to and empathise with. As Hoffman notes: 'How would my displays of emotion affect my informants' abilities to share the emotional components of their stories?' (2007, p. 340). I realised though that my challenge as a researcher lay in determining the degree of emotional sharing. Exercising reflexivity helps in managing emotions during the research process (Munkejord, 2009).

Reflexivity also meant reflecting on the fluid nature of positionality, since the interview in essence remains an interactional process (Denzin, 1978, pp.112-133). There are times when the researcher's position in the interaction changes, and the interviewer becomes the participant. This occurred a few times during our interviews, as for instance when Nagesh talked about the reforms in government services such as the digitization of applications for many important things like the passport or visa, or a PAN Card number, or for a permit to begin a proprietary business.

This sparked a discussion on reforms in government services, and the degree of political and economic changes in India, where my views were elicited. While I did not disclose any explicit stance that might risk introducing a bias into the data generation process, I focused on empathising with their responses. There followed an animated discussion between the three of us where I was no longer just the interviewer but an interlocutor. I came to agree with Folkes' (2022) call to move from 'shopping list' positionality to 'kitchen table' reflexivity. That is, rather than treating positionality as a set of static identity characteristics, like a shopping list, I endeavoured to acknowledge how my positionality was also fluidly constructed, negotiated and re-negotiated through organic talk and interaction *during* fieldwork (like chatting around the kitchen table) (Folkes, 2022). As Plesner (2011) states, 'Being an insider and an outsider are not finite positions but constantly negotiated.' Knowing that positionality is dynamic (Mikecz, 2012), and that it can evolve, or be transformed over the course of data collection, deepened my reflexive orientation (Lynch, 2000).

I was aware of the risks of diverging from my neutrality as a researcher, such as introducing social desirability bias into the dynamic if participants felt pressured to present themselves in ways they thought I valued (Kvale, 2007) or felt obliged to project and present themselves in positive ways that would meet culturally acceptable or desirable standards of behaviour (Chung and Monroe, 2003, p. 292). However, the benefits of engaging in informal conversations seemed to outweigh the risks. Striving to be responsive and empathetic seemed to help establish a comfortable and trusting foundation for participants to share more details about their settlement experiences. Responding animatedly to Nagesh and Maya's disclosures about changes in Indian lifestyles seemed to build trust and camaraderie that directly led to them making a personal disclosure about facing criticism from their family about their decision to move to Bangalore.

In addition to seeking rich data, I did not want to be 'a parachute researcher who treats the research participants as 'objects' rather than 'subjects' (Kelly, 2021, p.61). Thus, the interviews featured moments that, as Kvale (2007) puts it, became an 'inter-view' constructed in the 'interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of common interest' (2007, p.6).

Sharing identity characteristics (such as nationality, experience abroad, and in the majority of cases, gender) also seemed to build rapport and credibility. It has been acknowledged that while gaining access to elites is a challenge in itself, it is even harder to gain their trust and build an atmosphere of accord (Mikecz, 2012). It was helpful to convey my academic credentials and institutional affiliation at the outset, to gain credibility and 'reduce status imbalance' given the context of elite interviewing (Welch et al., 2002). It is possible that participants' spontaneous sharing of experiences, and their readiness to meet or talk multiple times was partly due to the credibility that my positionality lent to the exercise.

Reflecting on one's insider and/or outsider status in the research is key to reflexivity (Folkes, 2022). Although I would normally be ascribed an 'outsider' status considering that I was not a local, neither had I ever been a resident in a gated community, I realised that my identity as a researcher based at a Global North university brought me closer to the 'global Indian' persona that they themselves identified with, thus moving me subtly from 'outsider' to 'insider' status. This perception of me could have helped ease my way into the inner circle of the other gated community residents too. When I sought help from some of the participants to gather more respondents for my study, I was often introduced to that person as having 'come down from the UK' or as a 'UK researcher', which fact lent me a degree of credibility as someone who shared a commonality of experience. I found that the mention of my previous job as a journalist with a leading national newspaper also invited trust, especially because this group of returnees had spent their childhoods and much of their youth in India and were familiar with this particular newspaper that used to be delivered at their homes every day. Several participants expressed satisfaction about us not beginning with a blank slate. I thus found that knowledge of the participants' background and life trajectories helps facilitate access (Mikecz, 2012) and rapport (Conti & O'Neil, 2007; Liu, 2018).

It is also in the interests of reflexivity that I use the term 'generating' data rather than just 'collecting' it (Mason, 2002), since data is not simply lying there waiting to be collected. 'Generating' as a term implies more self-awareness (Clarence, 2014), though it still may not be the most appropriate term, for it suggests an excess of agency on the part of the researcher. Even so, this study employs the term to refer to a process wherein gaining data must involve reflexivity on the part of the researcher about their identity, positionality, responses and choices through all phases of the research cycle (Etherington, 2004; Folkes, 2022).

Data Analysis

Combining the principles of an interpretivist, relativist paradigm and Braun & Clarke's (2006) model of reflexive thematic analysis, I followed a six-stage process in my data analysis. Before outlining the six stages I will pause to explain how I arrived at the choice of reflexive thematic analysis. At first, I considered working with Conversation Analysis (CA) which is concerned with 'uncovering the underlying structures of talk in interaction and as such with the achievement of order through interaction' (Bryman, 2001) to selected portions of transcribed text, revealing structured patterns of talk (Heritage, 2013). However, in CA, context is only understood in terms of how the talk proceeds in sequence, and understanding is located only in terms of sequences of talk, which means that inferences cannot be made about the meaning of that talk in a larger cultural or social context. This contradicts the purpose of this research, which is to situate returnees' meaning-making around concepts such as home, belonging and identity *within* their larger social, cultural and economic context.

Discourse Analysis (DA) was another approach that I considered, as it views language as constituting or producing the social world (Bryman, 2001). DA is seen to 'emphasise the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse' (Potter, 1997). Some analysts have pointed out that while DA retains a realist position because like CA, it pays attention to sequences of talk, DA is 'anti-realist' and 'constructionist' for it places importance on a version of reality as constructed by the interviewee. This implies that the researcher cannot claim a privileged account of the social world being scrutinised, but instead must go by the particular view of social reality as presented through language. Engaging with DA helped me reflect on how my interviewees' narratives were partially socially constructed and helped me avoid a simplistic notion of accessing direct 'truths' of lived experience (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011; Riessman, 2008). However, DA's focus on language proved too narrow for this research, since I sought to understand multiple dimensions of participants' social and cultural contexts (including affective-spatial constructions and sensory artefacts, as I later explain).

I then arrived at the choice to carry out a reflexive thematic analysis or reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006) for two reasons. Firstly, TA provides a well-organised approach to analysing participants' meaning-making, giving me practical tools to actualise my relativist ontology and

interpretivist epistemology, and focus on how returnees interpret and make sense of their day-to-day life, interactions, memories and choices. Secondly, the flexibility and nuance of the approach is appealing; for example, Braun and Clarke (2006) have clarified that the frequency of a theme does not necessarily have bearing on its significance. This aligns with my observation in the pilot study that the depth, richness and importance of a returnee's experience, impression or emotion does not necessarily correlate with the *number* of times this experience, impression or emotion is reported across all the transcripts. I thus decided to adopt thematic analysis. I will now outline how I followed Braun and Clarke's six stages of data analysis (2006). I provide below, an audit trail of how I prioritised Yardley's (2000) criterion of 'commitment and rigour' for quality in qualitative research.

Stage 1: Familiarising myself with the data

Each interview lasted for 2 hours or more. Eager to capture participants' exact wordings as punctually as possible, I transcribed the interviews as and when they took place. During the main fieldwork, I wrote impressionistic field notes even whilst I generated data - both before and after interviews - to help me record and reflect on the nuances of participants' responses while the encounters were still fresh in my memory. Minute details such as gestures, expressions, behaviour, and such particulars that were pertinent to the context of the interview were to prove invaluable later at the data analysis stage. I also systematically journalled details of the long drives I undertook, the sights by the wayside, the casual people I met, and the differences between locales. These jottings, when placed alongside the transcripts, situated patterns of behaviour within returnees' larger social, cultural and economic context and carried clues as to the driving emotions and motivations of the people in the study.

Stage 2: Generating initial codes

The second stage involved iteratively coding transcripts to develop initial categories as a foundation for theme development. The pilot helped me create an open-ended set of *a-priori* or preliminary, tentative codes that responded to my Research Questions. This choice forms part of a cyclical coding approach wherein the *a-priori* codes (for example, 'participants' challenges with peer relationships after returning') could help structure the larger dataset later on during the main fieldwork, while these codes remained revised and expanded as necessary (Stuckey, 2015). I then developed descriptive codes and subcodes for

the full dataset once the main fieldwork was complete. Descriptive coding involved generating brief phases to summarise the content of different passages and sentences (Braun and Clarke, 2006), while sifting through participants' accounts of their everyday experiences, memories, interactions, conversations and emotions, and deepening my understanding of their emotional labour and identity work within the orb of resettlement. I coded narrative dimensions such as identity construction, temporal influences, biographical disruption, relationship stories, network enablers, germinal moments, inconsistencies, contradictions, and place-making (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Tuan, 2003).

Stage 3: Searching for themes

The third stage involved developing robust themes by categorising and grouping the codes and coded data into themes and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that researchers like me, who hold an interpretivist epistemology, analyse data at a latent level rather than a semantic one. This meant that I did not seek to take participants' words at face value, but transcended the semantic content to study underlying assumptions, concepts, and ideas that underpin what is explicitly stated, as reflexive TA recommends. From the lens of latent level analysis, I focused not only on individual narratives but also broader contexts and comparisons across narratives (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In line with reflexive TA, I did not equate frequency with significance (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, as I parsed each interview transcript minutely, prioritising multiple re-readings, I did circle the recurring viewpoints, notions or commonalities that rose to the surface. Heeding repetitions in the texts meant attending to 'topics that occur and reoccur' (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, p.83) or are 'recurring regularities' (Guba, 1990, p.53). For instance, most of the participants used the phrase 'finding home' or 'felt like home' or 'going home'. This helped me develop 'home and belonging' as a main theme in the findings and discussion sections.

Stage 4: Reviewing themes

I took two steps to review identified themes. First, in line with Yardley's (2000) criterion of 'coherence' for good qualitative research, I conducted multiple rereading of transcripts and codes to check that each theme had a logical and cohesive set of coded extracts. Second, from a holistic lens, I evaluated the credibility of individual themes in relation to the dataset as

a whole. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation to develop a thematic 'map' of the analysis, I also used graphic aids to visualise the full set of themes and review the connections and comparisons across the dataset.

Stage 4 involved revisions. For example, in their most recent work on reflexive TA, Braun and Clarke (2021) caution that subthemes should only be developed sparingly, when an element of a theme is notable or particularly salient for the research question. While reviewing themes within Stage 4, an occasion for developing a new subtheme did arise, when I realised that several returnees' meaning-making around preserving 'Indian culture' involved an element of religious identity - preserving 'Hinduness' - that was sufficiently rich and relevant enough to produce a subtheme. However, I also deleted a subtheme regarding different kinds of citizenship and visa documentation as I judged that a single theme would suffice for analytical clarity and precision.

Stage 5: Defining and naming themes

I then worked to refine the specific details within each theme (for example, whether the number of years spent abroad had bearing upon the returnees' emotional attachment to India). I maintained a codebook from Stage 2 onwards to record the definitions and examples of codes and themes being built, which came in useful during Stage 5 as I relied on the codebook to develop clear definitions and names for each theme.

Stage 6: Producing the final analysis

Writing up and presenting the final analysis meant selecting examples of particularly rich and compelling extracts and refining my discussion of each theme in relation to the research questions. I wove vignettes of participants' experiences into each chapter, following Phipps' (2022) observation that a vignette represents 'something small' and 'the bigger picture' simultaneously (p. 25). That is, vignettes comprise brief evocative accounts of lived experience while conveying larger themes about identity, home, and movement (Phipps, 2022).

Stage 6 also meant reviewing the extent to which my discussion was relevant to the research questions and discarded tangents that were interesting but did not ultimately support the purpose of the investigation (for example, children's resettlement experiences). I also reviewed whether my interpretations were aligned with the commitment to an interpretivist

epistemology and relativist ontology that I made at the beginning of the research. For example, I checked that my analysis was theorising multiple realities that participants may experience (and construct) through sociocultural processes, rather than presuming to pinpoint a singular fixed truth. As Braun and Clarke (2021) write in their recent work on reflexive TA, the ‘analytic task is one of storytelling rather than truth-telling’ (p.45).

While I prioritised reflexivity across all phases of the research cycle, as previously mentioned, I found it particularly important to engage in a reflexive approach to *representation* during Stage 6. When I embarked on this study, I made an ethical commitment to protecting participants’ welfare and associated dimensions such as privacy and consent (Creswell, 2006). However, given that this study researches an underrepresented, non-Western population, I was also conscious of the need to honour their narratives in their richness and complexity. My research does not focus upon decolonial or postcolonial approaches. However, while working with Yardley’s (2000) criterion of ‘sensitivity to context’ for good qualitative research, I chose to interpret ‘context’ as meaning not only my participants’ contexts, but also the broader dynamics of knowledge production in social science and related debates around data analysis and representation. I therefore kept myself informed about growing calls for ‘epistemic justice’ or ethical representation in the ways researchers based at Northern universities produce and disseminate knowledge about their participants, particularly non-Western populations (e.g., Connell, 2007). I reviewed the final analysis accordingly. For example, I remained sensitive to how several participants discussed issues of racism and belonging, ensured that their exact wordings were prioritised without erasures or misrepresentations, and took steps to reject an extractive approach and instead protect participants’ welfare, as subsequently detailed in the ‘Ethics’ section.

Ethics

It has been said that ‘qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world’ and therefore ‘their manners should be good and their ethics strict’ (Stake, 2005, p.459). As a qualitative interviewer, I ensured that the research was as transparent and attuned to participant welfare as possible. I ensured that I was ‘ethically sensitive’ (Bryman, 2001) by ensuring that the interviewee is fully cognizant of the nature and purpose of the interview, and anonymizing the names and locations of the participants, to maintain confidentiality and protect their privacy; besides conducting non-partisan interviews. As the researcher, I viewed interviews as essentially interactional and reflexive (Denzin, 2017). I wanted to be

transparent about my intentions, and therefore made the research goals clear from the start (Ostrander, 1995), by providing my interviewees with a Participant Information Sheet containing a summary of my research project, and its overall aims, before the interviews commenced.

Utilising the data in a way that respected participants' experiences was also a key consideration. Barber (2002, p. 385) notes that the choice to narrate one's personal experiences involves trust in the researcher and an implicit understanding that 'one's story will be heard in good faith'. Accordingly, I was fully cognizant of the 'delicate balance' between an interviewer's desire to pursue 'interesting knowledge' and the ethical responsibility to respect the interviewee's integrity and privacy (Kvale, 2007, p.8). For example, I devoted substantial ethical reflection, in consultation with my supervisors, colleagues and existing literature, on how to frame the question of racism, which can be a contentious issue. My reflexivity journal proved helpful, as I was able to improve my praxis through trial-and-error. In the example below, I present full quotes to enhance the transparency of this research.

In the pilot study, asking the direct question *"Have you ever faced any racist taunts?"* proved to be a mistake, as it was met with immediate denial by one participant, Manoj, who looked away, his face clouding a little. I decided to recalibrate the interview by approaching it in an indirect way.

I asked, *"But what do you think about racism, is it something the Indian and other ethnic minority communities face?"* He then expressed that he did not wish to address this subject. I then decided to introduce a lighter note into the interview to help protect my participant's sense of comfort and avoid triggering distress. While 'shifting to a completely different line of questioning' (Thomas, 1995), I asked my participants to shut their eyes and answer the question spontaneously -
Question to Manoj: "When I say these three words, what do you think of instantly?"

"Home?"

Manoj: "Mannanchery village, Kerala"

"Community?"

Manoj: "My colleagues at the hospital, my British neighbours"

"Belonging?"

Manoj: "India"

The rapid-response nature of this exercise made Mahesh smile, sparked a playful laugh between us at our eagerness to keep up the repartee as quickly as possible, and averted the tension that seemed likely to be if I had ‘grilled’ him about a potentially painful topic in a prolonged inquisitorial style. Such moments reminded me of Phipps’ (2013) observation that ethics are ‘not so much a state or imposition’ as a fluid, relational and mindful process: ‘deliberate actions... a common process of becoming and creating’ (p. 11).

I thus prioritised Ruth Josselson’s (2007) notions of the explicit and implicit contract. The explicit contract I made with participants involved thorough briefings about their rights (such as consent and withdrawal). However, the implicit contract was committing, as a researcher, to participants’ welfare in case of unforeseen situations, threats to their wellbeing, or ‘differing assumptions, expectations and contingencies’ (p.539). I did not view participants as mere objects of data extraction, but individuals with whom I wished to forge a ‘deeply human, genuine, empathic and respectful’ researcher-participant relationship (Josselson, 2007, p.539). This stance prioritises ‘a genuine concern for the wellbeing of other human beings’ as ‘integral’ to research (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020, p. 75).

* The names of all the gated complexes mentioned in this study have been anonymised for reasons of data privacy.

Chapter 4

The Identity Project - Dual Belonging and the un-fixedness of 'Home'

Imagined Geographies and Simultaneous Identity

"Papa only works here, that's why we are here, this is not our home. For years before we returned, this is what I constantly told the children... Australia is our temporary home. We are here because of Papa's job. We belong to India, not Australia. We would tell them this over and over again, so that they would not look on Australia as their home. I knew that they felt they belonged there - there was a conflict in their minds. In all the 15 years that we were there, I never allowed myself to buy good furniture or expensive curtains, or even an expensive bed! Because I always thought - what's the point? We are going back anyway! We didn't even buy a house of our own, almost till the end of our stay, and then only as an investment (we sold it before we returned)."

- Lata Gollamudi, Seegehalli, Bangalore.

Lata and Amaresh Gollamudi migrated to Australia in the year 1999, after an 'arranged marriage', and went on to live and work in Sydney and Melbourne for 15 years. Given that the familial structure in South Asia continues to be patriarchal and patrilocal (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001), the choice of marriage partners largely remains in the hands of the parents (Yeung et al, 2018). Like thousands of other immigrant families, Lata and Amaresh remained embedded in kin networks that wound great distances across the globe. Studies in transnationalism have found that migrants can integrate with the host country, even as they engage transnationally with the country of origin, thus contradicting the idea that 'society and the nation-state are one and the same' (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1003). As diasporic inhabitants of 'imagined geographies of India' (Mendes and Lau, 2019), based on the real, the imagined and the constructed, they straddle both the geographical, as well as the created landscape of their imagination.

In this chapter, I consider how transnational actors may draw together multiple strands to construct and project a self-perceived identity (Tsuda, 2012), which would make the task of retaining singular affiliations or invoking one predominant identity very difficult. I look at how 'home' moves with the migrant and reflect on the migrant's myriad ways of being and belonging. Though the notion of 'belonging' can 'evoke an emotional attachment to a place of

origin' (Sigona et al, 2015, p.xix), the narratives of the returnees in this study affirm that the idea of home need not only be connected to a particular location. I sift through their accounts to probe whether identity, home and belonging are inextricably tied up together in the processes of return migration; to understand how an inherent search for self, a quest for identity, and the constant soul-searching and longing for meaning may settle into a reflexive reconciliation of the hybrid rather than the singular.

Accordingly, in this study, I draw on the notion of 'simultaneity', or 'living lives that incorporate daily activities, routines, and institutions located both in a destination country and transnationally' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004, p.1003) to highlight the interconnectedness of transnational practices and notions of dual belonging held by migrants. As the above scholars explain, this conceptual framework helps in reconceptualising the boundaries of social life; 'it becomes clear that the incorporation of individuals into nation-states and the maintenance of transnational connections are not contradictory social processes' (ibid., p.1003). Migrants settle into the new receiving society, even as they continue to nurture old ties that bind them to the country of origin.

I also adopt a transnational lens as an analytical tool to focus on the fluid social spaces migrants inhabit, that are constantly re-forming because of their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Pries, 2005; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). A shifting of the lens from multi-spatiality to multi-relationality is imperative as it yields snapshots of the effects of their interconnectedness in both origin and host countries (Boccagni, 2016). I pay heed therefore to the diverse set of belongings and identities that are derived from the migrant's transnational links and connections, for it leads to a better diasporic understanding. This in turn can 'challenge the fixity of identity invoked by ethnicity' (Kalra et al. 2005, p. 16). This expands the scope of scrutiny and allows migrant identity to be seen as a work in progress.

Cultural Reproduction

All through the time Lata and Venkat lived in Australia, they worked hard at keeping nostalgia alive. Venkat worked at IBM as a software engineer, while Lata was largely a homemaker. They were consistent about sending remittances to their family members and voiced impassioned

political opinions about India during sessions with Indian friends in Australia. They enrolled the family in multiple Indian cultural associations, cooked only Indian vegetarian food at home, and celebrated Indian festivals such as Diwali and Holi along with other expat Indian families in Australia.

Scholars like Safran (1991) and Clifford (1994) suggest that members of a diasporic group are bound by a collective memory of the homeland, and a commitment to the ideal of return. As a mother, Lata's kin work moved beyond practical goals of acquiring foreign citizenship and providing education to her offspring, to instil in them notions of belonging to the homeland. Lata, in particular, has always seen her role in the family as the 'custodian of tradition' (Belliappa, 2013, p.166), as the one responsible for her family's cultural preservation. As Belliappa puts it, 'women's reflexive construction of self is thus marked by their position as bearers of their families', and the culture's spirituality' (ibid., p.166). This is reflected in Lata's long stretches of volunteering at her children's school to explain 'Indian culture' to them:

"I wanted people at school to know about our culture. At home, I did not leave any gap in my children's understanding - such as who we originally are, what their mother-tongue is, no doubts like that. They know where they belong, or who they are, where they come from - if you don't show them at home, there will be a big gap between parents and kids."

For transnational actors like Lata and Venkat, and many others, their professional and transnational status allows them the freedom to create and practise a customised form of Indianness. Smitha Radhakrishnan's ethnographic analysis of Indian IT professionals in Bangalore, Mumbai, South Africa and Silicon Valley (2011) refers to the 'cultural streamlining process' that migrants adopt in their lives in the receiving country, whereby the diverse palette of Indian cultural norms is whittled down to a manageable, stable and modular set of norms and practices that represent 'Indian culture' in a more generic way. Cultural streamlining allows the migrant to create an 'appropriate difference' (ibid., p.4) that is still acceptable to Western society. For instance, every year during their years in Australia, on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi (the festival of Ganesha, the elephant god), Lata would fashion a small idol of the deity out of clay: *"... just the way I used to make it as a young girl at home in India"*. She took pride in the fact that she had taught her daughter to do it too, and that her entire family would get together and reproduce the 'Indian cultural event' in their neighbourhood in Australia:

"We made it a point to wear festive clothes and carry Ganesha, and go to the lake together (Amaresh always took leave on that day) to do the visarjan as per our religious custom. In Australia one is allowed to do that, because it's a community festival, though we can't just celebrate it like the way we do in India - we have to take the appropriate permission. But the authorities allow it, so on the same day that my relatives in India were doing the visarjan*, we would be doing it in our hometown in Australia!"*

(* visarjan - An annual Hindu religious ritual whereby the clay deity of the elephant god Ganesha is immersed in a water body after the prescribed period of worship, to symbolise the cycle of life and death, and the release of the immortal soul)

The reconstruction of a religious event in the receiving society, moving it from memory space to physical space captures the agency Lata exercises in using memory as a tool to define a sense of self in a spatial and temporal frame (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). This act of cultural reproduction serves a purpose that goes beyond being a ritual of sacralization or votive offering; it gathers together circles of trust (Werbner, 2014) comprising new friends, perhaps a few relatives, and members of the receiving society. It can also be inferred that by celebrating the religious ritual publicly, Lata, like many other migrants, is inscribing her home spatially in the new place of settlement.

Even as Lata conveys her pride at being able to safeguard her cultural heritage, she is quick to add that she needs permission to do so. Australia has to allow it. Despite being citizens of Australia, they cannot but abide by the law of the land, which in this case allows minority communities to carry out cultural practices, though within limits. They are citizens, but Australia is after all, the receiving country; at all times therefore, they must exercise their right to cultural identification without losing sight of their boundaries. It becomes evident that as transmigrants, they generate and nurture a hybrid identity derived from both the receiving society and the ethnic-origin society. While the term 'hybrid' was used largely to refer to people of mixed race, it has acquired a new dimension in recent literature to connote the 'notion of in-betweenness', implying a blurring of boundaries (Ang in Zournazi, 1998, p.160).

Lata and Venkat's children can be said to harbour a hybrid identity. They grew up and schooled in Australia, and only visited India once a year. Yet, they were active participants in traditional rituals such as this, and other festive celebrations conducted both at home, and by Indian

cultural associations in Australia. This can be attributed to the fact that they were raised within a 'transnational family habitus' which is defined as 'a structured set of values, ways of thinking and 'being' within the family built up over time through family socialisation, practices and cultural traditions that transcend national boundaries' (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018, p. 418). Both socialisation and social reproduction took place in response to dual social and cultural contexts (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) - processes that trace their genesis to the ancestral place of origin. The children spoke their mother-tongue at home, and they would often spend their summer vacation with their grandparents in India. Enconced within the transnational family habitus, these visits exposed them to the concept of intergenerational caregiving and allowed a notion of identity to develop (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018).

To a considerable degree, these traditions shaped the children's perspectives and values, even though very often, the significance of many of the rituals was not clear to them. However, the very obscurity of the ritual presented within the arc of appropriate cultural symbols and signs often validates the antiquity of the culture for the participant. Here, rituals can be understood to represent 'a historic, static notion of culture' (Dhingra, 2007, p.178), the practice of which can aid the practitioner to bond with their cultural heritage. In the safeguarding of an authentic ethnic identity, cultural practices tied to religious rituals become important, and sustain a sense of self. It is possible that the effects of being raised in a strong transnational social field could linger on in their adult lives. The social networks they access along with their parents, could well prove useful later in both host and home countries, and influence their mobile trajectories (Levitt, 2009, p.1226). However, other studies suggest that many second-generation migrants experience a weakening of ethnic cultural bonds (Dhingra, 2007). While first-generation immigrants may maintain multiple identities, their children may not choose to do the same once they attain adulthood. They could well privilege one identity over the others as they grow older.

Dr Manoj Nair who emigrated to the UK over 30 years ago, and lives and practices in Chelmsford, acknowledges this. He is unsure about his children, who are now working adults and UK citizens, practising any of the cultural traditions that he himself had grown up with in India, though his wife and he had attempted to recreate them, albeit in a watered-down form, when the children were young:

"They don't feel what I feel, but how can they? Back home in India, we didn't have to work at it, rituals were part of everyday life. Here Meera and I are self-conscious about things like having a puja room, or waking the whole family up before dawn on a festival day to have an oil bath - like I did as a child. Besides, they'd want to give their children their own set of cultural values, based on what they have imbibed here in England. Even if I wanted to return to India one day, they never would".*

{*puja room - a small room or space set aside in the home for quiet prayer}

A 'Home' that Travels with the Subject

The nostalgic tone in his voice carries a certain homeland consciousness, a suggestion that he sees his ancestral home as 'authentic', and as a place of eventual return (King & Christou, 2008). A place has the meaning one gives it, thus a sense of place is born of 'a feeling that you belong to a particular place and feel comfortable there' (Easthope, 2009, p.130). Manoj's 'sense of place' can be understood in relation to 'the politics of identity' when one defines oneself in opposition to an 'other' (Rose, 1997, p.104). It suggests that part of how you define yourself is linked to where your roots lie. Yet, while he has recurring bouts of nostalgia, he has never acted on those notions beyond dwelling on them theoretically; he has never actually initiated return migration. He chose to experience 'home' as a 'virtual place, a repository for memories of the lived spaces' (Mallet, 2004, p.62).

Lata's longing to 'return home' was stoked by annual return visits to the home country, steady acts of care-giving and physical participation in clan events like weddings and funerals. Frequent return visits are a significant expression of transnational social space (King & Christou, 2008) and these kinship links become crucial in structuring the 'return project' (Christou, 2006):

"Every year we would visit our families in India, even if it was expensive to make that trip. Just because we wanted to show them our rituals, festivals, the traditions that my family and my community have followed for generations. I would like my kids to know them. Follow them? I cannot say. But at least to know about it, the way we do it at home."

Importantly, the space Lata defines as home is not fixed, it is 'multi-sited' (King & Christou, 2008). The term 'home' is used to describe both her old family home in India as well as their home in Australia. While 'home' can be interpreted as being anchored in the memories of her youth, it also swings easily between the past and the present.

Thus, 'home' becomes more than a physical place, it is a home that travels with the subject – a sentimentalised space of belonging (Ahmed, 1999). It lends itself to complex abstractions relating to the intersections of home, memory, identity and belonging (Blunt, 2007). Despite owning a house in Melbourne and having lived in Australia for over 15 years, the couple nursed notions of belonging to a distant, almost mythical homeland which symbolised their identity, their roots. As Massey and Jess state - "the physical environment is an essential part of place, but it is always an interpreted element" (1995, p.219).

'Home' therefore can be understood as an emotive facet of well-being. It is a significant type of 'place' that holds 'considerable social, psychological and emotive meaning for individuals and for groups' (Easthope, 2004, p.135). 'Place' here connects the material physicality of 'house' and the sociocultural and emotive construct of 'home'. Extending beyond the confines of geographical boundaries, 'homes' like 'places' are constructed by the social relations that permeate their inner spaces and give it meaning.

Often, a line is drawn around one's home occupied prior to immigration to secure it in memory. At various points in time, in the midst of living a new life in a foreign land, that particular memory is accessed and taken recourse to, for a degree of emotional security. Thus 'home' can also be a location or a sense of belonging to others' (Antonsich, 2010, p.646). When Lata talks about her role as a daughter-in-law, when she stakes out a place for herself within the dense web of family hierarchy, her words carry a note of pride, as though that aspect of her previous life, that aspect of her identity is integral to her well-being. The strength of that reciprocal interaction ensures that ties across vast distances remain intact:

"I am aware of everything that goes on in my in-laws' house even while I am overseas. Without my knowledge nothing happens - no puja, no celebration, no major purchase for the house, or anything like that. I am given that importance because I am the eldest daughter-in-law in the family (I have two younger sisters-in-law) and I am next in line after my in-laws to look after everyone. That is how it is - they consult me on Skype for everything. They even show me the colour of the sarees* they buy, and everything."*

{*puja - act of worship; *saree or sarees: a flowing length of cotton or silk wrapped around the body in folds, traditionally worn by women in South Asia}

Trans Connectivity and Virtual Familyhood

The past decade has seen an intensification of online communication through the use of technology platforms. Research on digital diasporas now dwells on the creative conceptualising of home and the homeland that is made possible at the intersection of migration and new technologies. These Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have diminished the distance between 'here' and 'home' (Andersson, 2019) and contribute to an enhanced sense of belonging to the homeland (Rinnawi, 2012). New ICTs contribute to the maintenance of transnational practices such as remittances, home visits, and reproduction of cultural practices in synchrony with kith and kin.

Veena Advani who spent 17 years in the US before deciding to move back to India in 2009, recalls that Skype played an important part in helping them reconnect with their parents and siblings back home. Veena had moved to Iowa in the US in 1993 to study for an MBA in International Business & Marketing; she married her classmate Mihir in 1996, and subsequently moved to Chicago, where they embarked on their career paths. They lived and worked in the US for almost two decades, became parents to two children, and nurtured successful careers. Living in a gated community in Bangalore today, Veena remembers that her early years in the US were emotionally trying, because she felt distanced from her family in India:

"Those years in the 90s... the email culture was barely there. When I finally set up a Gmail account and sent an email to my Dad at his office address, he actually took a printout and carried it home to show my mother! It was that precious. Before that, my mother used to write to me laboriously on those blue aerogrammes. I used to phone my family in India every Sunday, and we would speak for exactly 10 minutes. That's all we could afford. Those days it was 2 dollars and 50 cents per minute for a phone call! So, you can imagine how hard it was, how expensive it was for us back then. Then came Skype, and all my homesickness vanished! We could see them, talk as much as we wanted, it was so liberating! Skype replaced phone communication for me."

Veena has found the immediacy of the new technology media very rewarding:

"Now that we are here in India, we are constantly on Whatsapp, Google Meet, and Zoom to know what our friends in the US are doing on a daily basis!"

While several scholars have suggested that migration can disturb the rhythm of former social relations and pose a challenge to the retaining of former identities (Butcher, 2009; Conradson & Latham, 2005, 2007; Rojek & Urry, 1997), it appears that transnational practices such as the adoption of new media has ‘enhanced the reproduction of kinship bonds over long distances’ (Fechter, 2016, p.55).

King-O’Riain’s (2013) work on how transnational families in Ireland stay in touch with their loved ones, focuses on how socio-spatial distance is bridged with a technology platform like Skype. Caregiving and ‘emotional streaming’ (King-O’Riain, 2013) are made possible through the use of webcam technology. Thus, families create spaces of ‘trans connectivity’, enabling ‘simultaneous belonging across significant temporal and geographic distances’ (King-O’Riain, 2013, p.257). The low usage cost and lack of restriction on the time taken on platforms like Skype act as further incentives. Emotional streaming includes continuous webcam use, as for example, keeping Skype turned on for long periods of time, which allows the participants to achieve visual and aural connection, and create a window into one another’s daily lives, rather than restricting interaction to a few minutes.

Manoj talks animatedly about Skyping with his sister in Kerala (South India) at least thrice every week; thus, living and sharing their lives simultaneously:

“We have lots to talk about... Sometimes it’s about food, we often cook at the same time! She makes Kerala fish curry with raw mangoes in a clay pot while I could be baking a fish pie...and sometimes she teaches me how to make it her way! At other times it’s about the old days when we were young. I listen to her grumbling about the quality of fish, or about the local elections. We have been watching our native Malayalam language television channels here in England so that we can discuss the same movies or sitcoms, even the elections. After all, I was born there, educated there... so the connection is still there, I feel attached to India. We are now British citizens, but we made it a point to acquire OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) cards too.”

Food, both the making and consuming of it, can conjure up a multifaceted experience of place, as Law describes it in her (2001) work on domestic workers cooking and eating Filipino food in Little Manila in Hong Kong, thereby consuming different experiences of Hong Kong, home, and nation. Manoj’s performance of a domestic act like cooking in his kitchen in Chelmsford is an embodied experience that both ‘takes place’ and is ‘produced’ (Law, 2001,

p. 266). The material structure of the kitchen in Chelmsford offers Manoj a space to imagine and build an intangible space of belonging that merges his present and past experiences of home. Thus, the private space is transformed by domestic practice and attains its identity as 'home' (Dant, 1999). In a sense, Manoj is building an abstract edifice of home and dwelling in it. Through his act of homemaking in England, he can access archived memories of an earlier home in India and practise dual belonging.

Manoj's pangs of longing for the homeland (Safran, 1991) are possibly alleviated by his experience of 'multi-placedness' that coalesces into a far less demanding 'homing' desire (Brah, 1996). This is an important insight for it negates the prevailing idea that diasporic groups are solely focused on returning to their place of origin (Walsh, 2015, p.125). Manoj's yearning to belong to an imaginary of his earlier home can be understood as a response to the affective dimension of his transnational identity. His act of homemaking, channelised through a technology channel, vaults him over the boundaries of physical space into a realm of dual domestic belongings.

Ensnared in the psychological state of what Hillis called 'digital affectivity', namely 'the emotional influence on individuals and groups induced by digital media's specific kinds of psychic and experiential effects' (1999, p. 263), immigrants like Manoj and Veena make meaning in their everyday lives. By accessing digital technology, they try to maintain 'co-presence' (Hillis, 1999). As Manoj confesses, the feeling is as if *"they are in the same room"*.

Would Manoj consider actually returning to India? He confesses to having mixed feelings about return migration:

"See, I can wear a mundu and shirt, instead of a formal suit... I could mix with the locals again in my ancestral village, plant some jackfruit trees - it's something to think about when I am working in my garden here in Chelmsford. But my wife would never go back, she doesn't feel as strongly about India. She feels that both of us are not who we were when we left India, we have changed so much that we may not be able to settle back in. Our kids were born in England, they belong here. But I feel I belong to both countries."*

{* mundu - The mundu is a garment worn around the waist in South India}

As a member of a transnational 'e-family' (Benítez, 2012), Manoj is able to 'do family' (Morgan, 2013) through everyday actions mediated by ICTs. This enables a deintensification of a sense of

loss (King-O'Riain, 2013), toning down his longing for the homeland. Yet not all diasporic migrants settle for virtual bonding. Eventually, Lata and Amaresh did act on their long-cherished dream. They returned to India in 2014, nursing memories of the homeland, and buoyed by thoughts of giving their children unbounded access to their beloved 'Indian culture', and perhaps also, to find answers to their own lingering disquiet about identity and belonging. At the time of this interview, they stayed in a mid-sized housing complex in an upper-class neighbourhood, part of a rapidly increasing affluent sprawl in Whitefield, on the outskirts of Bangalore's city centre.

The OCI Safety Net

Like almost all of the returnees in this study, Lata and Amaresh retained both - citizenship in the previous receiving country, and a national identity card in their home country. This would appear to be a precautionary measure, as the retention of foreign citizenship makes available an exit option, in the event of return migration proving unsuccessful (Carling et al, 2015). Early on in their resettlement into India, the couple had acquired an OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) Card, which proved useful in many ways - registering for an Aadhar Card (a 12-digit individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India on behalf of the Government of India, which functions as a proof of identity and address anywhere in the country), getting a gas connection, renting accommodation, and such allied necessities. While India does not permit dual citizenship, an OCI Card (introduced in 2005) allows them to embrace a 'global Indian' form of quasi- citizenship and identity (Roy, 2006).

Endorsed by the right-wing nationalist political party that assumed power in 1999, the OCI card has enabled diasporic Indians to designate themselves members of a 'new India' that represents the nation as an economic power to be reckoned with (Kaur, 2012) - a brand- building imaginary of India enthusiastically promoted by the central government as it aligns with their intent to bring overseas Indians within the larger fold of the national community. Yet the fact remains that though ostensibly the OCI scheme was designed to nurture a 'mutually beneficial relationship' between the Indian diaspora and India and satisfy the 'emotional need of the diaspora' (Roy, 2008; Report of the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora, 2002, p. 5), there was an underlying expectation of the diaspora serving its country through remittances. Though the OCI Card was meant to draw the entire diaspora under the umbrella of a single identity, eligibility for

OCI membership was actually limited to countries like North America, Europe, and Australasia - in other words, highly skilled 'successful' migrants living in prosperous developed nations (Dickinson and Bailey, 2007, pp.765-66; Varell, 2011).

Anupama Roy in her incisive work on the migrant and the citizen in India, points out that there was a wave of criticism of the OCI Card as an instrument of class bias. This included a stringent remark by one Fatima Meer at the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention on 9 January 2003. Meer, who was a member of the African National Congress, critiqued the OCI scheme as nothing more than a 'dollar and pound citizenship' (Roy, 2008, p.242). The allegation of the ulterior motive of economic benefit however was denied by the same committee - 'We do not wish to advocate dual nationality only for diaspora remittances, important though they are to India's development. The principal rationales of the demand of the diaspora for dual citizenship, however, is sentimental and psychological, a consideration which commends itself to the Committee in the same measure as do social, economic and political factors' (Report of the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora, 2002, p. 510).

The OCI Card continues to be offered only to select overseas Indians, and it is increasingly being adopted by many transnational migrants. While it is a striking example of how transnational practices can dislodge 'dominant narratives of citizenship and the nation' (Lawson, 2000, p.174), the OCI Card-holding 'global Indian' has also become a symbol of the privileged, hyper-mobile migrant today, or a paradigm of a 'borderless world' (Ohmae, 1990).

Dual Belonging and Multiple Identities

The literature on transnationalism often emphasises the 'celebratory', even 'emancipatory' nature of 'global flows' (Fechter, 2016, p.20), but it is also true that this fluidity of transition across multiple social spaces has consequences for migrant identity. As multiform hybrid identities and multiple societal memberships increasingly become the norm, and the power to construct ties across national borders can be interpreted as subversive of the modern system of state and territory, the 'portability of national identity' (Sassen, 1998) comes at a certain cost. Migrants' cross-border ties do undermine the hegemony of state borders (Rios & Adiv, 2010). However, claiming membership in more than one setting because of their access to dual citizenship and/or dual national identity cards can contribute to a sense of 'gradual

detrterritorialization of citizenship for the migrant' (Cassarino, 2004, p.263). Consequently, transnational actors might find it challenging to experience sole attachment to their geographical place of residence (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Portes, 2001).

Research on identities has drawn to light multiple variants such as 'flexible' or 'graduated' citizenship (Ong, 1999), 'post-national' (Soysal, 1994), 'diasporic' (Laguerre, 1998) or 'transnational' (Baubock, 1994) identity. Key to this study is the concept of the 'global Indian', which resonates with the conceptualising of a 'global India' category across the globe by the Indian state (Upadhyay, 2013). The term 'global Indians' encompasses people of Indian origin across the world and encourages them to contribute to the economy of India, while simultaneously prodding deep-seated memories of their cultural bond with the country (Biswas, 2005, p.58). Thus 'global' and 'new India' gets emplaced within the process of return migration, and in a sense 'de-territorialise Indian citizenship' (Roy, 2008). The ideology of 'global Indianness' has powered a standardised set of beliefs and practices that diasporic Indians draw on - a sense of belonging to the Indian nation even whilst adopting a global lifestyle (Radhakrishnan, 2011). 'Where previously, Indianness and Westernness were opposed to one another, a discourse of global Indianness makes the two compatible' (ibid., p.9); thus, even after returning to the home society, the Indian migrant may continue to reconcile dialectically experienced notions of belonging while reconnecting with the land that he or she grew up in.

One participant in this study, Oliver Joseph, describes himself as a "*global Indian*". His wife Rita adds that they are "*global by nature and Indian by culture*". Oliver, a software engineer from Bombay, began working at Texas Instruments in the US in 1998, and later moved there with his wife Rita in 2005 after they had their first baby. Their second child was born in the US, and in 2006, they became permanent residents of the United States. In 2011, however, they decided to relinquish their Green Cards and return to India in order to be with their parents. Currently, they live in a penthouse, inside a gated community in Whitefield, Bangalore.

Like some returnees who link their experiences of living and working in foreign countries to their self-ascribed identity (Ilkjaer, 2016), Oliver interprets a 'global' identity as one of an open-minded, well-travelled person whose ability to transit between continents becomes a social signifier of status (Urry, 2011). He is reluctant to box himself into what he calls an 'Indian-Indian' type of identity slot:

“Not a fan of the kind of mindset that says we are Indians so we can only mix with fellow Indians, or that we can only live and work in India. I can live and work anywhere. When we were in the US, we kept in touch with political events in India, celebrated Indian festivals, but we were never the ‘Indian-Indian’ type... I was never crazy about our kids absorbing ‘Indian culture’, though so many of my Indian friends were taking their kids for an endless round of Indian classical dance and music classes, even bhajan classes, for heavens’ sake! We were not fussed about ‘oh, we will only cook Indian food at home! We had friends from many places - America, Vietnam, Singapore, England.”*

{*bhajan – devotional songs}

Oliver sees himself as *“different from other Indians, not rigid about things”*, and his words seem to highlight the fluidity of his hybrid identity:

“Be it Thanksgiving or Id or Diwali, I am at ease in any setting. I can drink saké, eat sushi with a Japanese colleague, enjoy kimchi with my Korean friends, or just plain burgers with my American friends! Talk their language, eat their food...”

Oliver seems to position himself as someone who is not strait-jacketed by national boundaries or identities, instead, he embraces a state of ‘in-betweenness’ (Ang in Zournazi, 1998, p. 160) or being between positions. By virtue of it being a hybrid identity, it is no longer a fixed one (Easthope, 2009). One can see the influence of his capacity for mobility and the experience of migration on his perception of self. Even while stating that his motivation to return to India stemmed from his attachment to his parents, Oliver asserts his hybridity of identity when he says:

“Wherever I go, I know I can adapt. Even though we have come back here out of choice, we could go back too one day, if the right opportunity comes up. Maybe not right now, but it’s all open – the future. For now, it’s about family in India.”

‘Family’ is central to everyday decision-making in India and close family ties are highly valued (Kou, Mulder, and Bailey, 2017). Even amongst geographically dispersed transnational families, caregiving occurs frequently across the life course (Yeates, 2012; Silverstein, Gans, and Yang, 2006). Rita explains that they were unsure about how much time they had left with their respective parents, and they wanted to fulfil their care-giving duties:

“As it turned out, both my mother and his father passed away within a few years of our coming back, so it was a good decision to return. It wasn’t about coming back to India because of ‘Indian culture’. We do celebrate all festivals with our community here inside the GC, but we are not particular about having

Indian decor at home, or Indian bathrooms, or eating with our hands etc. You won't find a steel thali in my house - it's very modern in design. Even our kids are very independent, like American kids. Thank God we were in the US during the children's early years - we learnt so much about parenting."*

{* thali - a round steel platter used to serve food in South Asia with individual bowls for vegetable and meat servings)

For Rita, the desire to return to India was also driven by the need to restart her own career, which had taken a back seat while they were living in the US. Along with her US-based brother, Rita had been managing a small webcasting business in India for 5 years before she married her childhood friend Oliver. She had to give that up when she moved with Oliver to the US in 2003. Without a work visa and two little children to manage, she became a stay-at-home spouse wedged into a lonely space with just her kids for company, and time hanging heavily on her hands. It was at this juncture that the excitement of having migrated successfully to the United States, began to be replaced by a gnawing awareness of missed career opportunities in her own life:

"I realised that I was taking the kids to the zoo thrice a week (!) and seeing Oliver only every other weekend because he was very busy, travelling all over the globe. Then I began pining for home. I felt like I didn't know who I was anymore. When Oliver was offered a posting in Bangalore, he was not very keen initially on returning, but I persuaded him. He was being given a big responsibility by his company, the money was good, and I was sure that my life would be easier with the domestic help and childcare facilities so easily available. Things would be good for the children too, they would have many more family members in their lives - cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles."

The idea of expanding her children's personal community was extremely appealing to another returnee in this study. Ameera Ali, who worked as a Public Relations professional at Weber & Shandwick in the US for 11 years before returning to India in 2010, believed that it was important to expose her children to life in India:

"I don't know if my children understand fully why I brought them back, but maybe when they are older, they will. And I hope they thank me for it then."

Migrating to the US was never part of her plan, Ameera explains, while growing up in a small town named Kannur in Kerala in South India, and later studying at a college in the city of Chennai in the state of Tamil Nadu.

"I had a traditional arranged marriage, so I had no choice really, I had to accompany my husband. But even in that first year I remember talking to Aarif about returning to India someday... And we did, before our children became teenagers, because by that age they would have become Americans and they would have visited India as Americans."

Ameera is very clear about what she perceives as 'American' culture:

"See, in America, it's all about the individual, while in India, you are connected - you are a building block of the whole social structure. Someone has passed away - you don't just go in black, hear speeches, sit formally. Nothing wrong with that, it's just culturally different. I recall going for Aarif's uncle's funeral after returning to India - when the body arrived, people were sad but otherwise it was an everyday ritual. People were chatting with each other, food was circulating, some matchmaking happened on the side. That's how it is here - life and death, side by side. And watching that, I felt a certain connection to this land. Suppose we go for a wedding or a social occasion in the US - the kids want to know - do we have to come with you? In India, it's taken for granted that the kids accompany you, they can entertain themselves or help around, they just mingle with relatives and neighbours as though they belong there. I just want my children to experience this connection...though at this point, there is no guarantee that they will stay."

The anxiety over their offspring losing connection with their social and cultural moorings features constantly in many accounts of returnee Indians. Ameera's emphasis on 'that is how it is here' is reflective of her nostalgic attachment to her place of origin, her need to demonstrate to her children 'the (imagined) stability and coherence of past times and places' (Basu, 2007, p.7). Sentimentalisation of a place in the home society is often tied up with identification with the homeland; both processes become critical to constructing self-identity and a sense of belonging. For transnational migrants like those in this study, return migration can serve as a conduit to deepen their attachments to the homeland. *"Living in the West gives you this really tainted, pitiable picture of India... we came back because we wanted to give our kids a balanced picture"* says Priya Naidu who returned to India after living and working in the US, and other countries, for over 13 years.

Priya was an engineering graduate from a university in Andhra Pradesh in South India who met her future husband while working for a multinational power company in Calcutta. After their marriage, they moved to the US where Keshav had a job with an international investment banking firm. Priya enrolled for a master's degree in Industrial Engineering at an Ivy League university, and then

switched lanes to move into Financial Risk Management. She worked at an international accounting firm for many years, before leaving to accompany Keshav to Singapore, South America, and back to the US, where Priya resumed her career for a while. Then Keshav's professional trajectory directed another move, this time to Hong Kong where they lived for another 5 years. It was in 2011, that they decided to return to India and reconnect with the land they felt was unfairly projected in the West.

A decade later, Priya and Keshav have settled comfortably into their luxurious gated community in Bangalore, yet stay connected to their friends and professional networks in the US through annual visits and virtual media. When she reflects on the past decade in India, Priti says:

"It has been comfortable so far, particularly inside our gated community. But I can be comfortable anywhere in case I have to move... For a 45- something to say that I don't know where I belong - it may be strange I know. I feel like I fit in anywhere. Of course, here, I don't have to 'be' anything. I feel I am as much as possible 'myself' here in India. In the US, I never identified or projected myself as 'Indian', I never felt anything about my colour. I know that some Indians do project a different self in the US, but I didn't feel I needed to do that. I am comfortable in my own skin in India or anywhere."

Flexibility and Mobility

Transnational mobility can lead to new kinds of subjectification taking place across political borders (Ong, 1999, p.34), and flexibility is a crucial aspect of that process. However, while flexibility is perceived to be driving innovation today, it has not always been seen in a positive light by earlier scholars. Fredric Jameson argued that it powers a relentless form of consumption and commoditization, besides a fragmentation and proliferation of cultures at the same time, thus expressing the 'postmodern logic of late capitalism' (1991). Within the contours of my study of transnational mobility, flexibility can translate into enabling identity construction in a reflexive way. The capacity to uproot oneself and change one's life course both often, and willingly, illustrates how migrants like Oliver are not averse to displacement, and do not see it as disorienting. Rather, he appears to welcome the idea of displacement, tying it to the idea of being *"free to travel the world"*. As an employee on an intra-company transfer, Oliver was offered a generous financial package almost at par with what he was

receiving in the US, including relocation costs, airfare, housing costs, a car and driver, medical insurance, and part-funding of children's education fees:

"It was a great offer, but what appealed to me most was the prospect of being free to move back and forth between India and the US, since I would still be working for the parent company".

As a trailing spouse whose husband is officially based in India while retaining professional mobility, Rita also perceived it as an ideal situation in which she would also have the flexibility to structure her own life along new lines. As planned, she launched her own fitness business, while Oliver continues to work for Texas Instruments, and continues to travel to the US from Bangalore at least three times a year. It's been 10 years since Oliver and Rita have returned, and the challenges of identity and alterity continue:

"Right now, Rita and I, and our kids, are living comfortably like foreign-returned Indians in India. But we travel to the US once or twice a year. We've signed up for this program called AFS – American Field Services, which is a global cultural exchange program. So, we host a foreign student once a year – one girl came down from Austria to stay with us in Bangalore, then someone from Norway, Thailand.... Our kids get the same opportunity. So that way we are not bound to one location, it's not like we don't keep the door open."

Reconciling Identities

Notions of dual belonging can also be read in the light of Levi-Strauss' theme of dualism (1963) - the human tendency to rationalise the world as experienced by the individual by 'sorting perceptions into paired opposites, which are then reconciled' (Murphy, 1979, p.29). Thus, the Indian migrant on foreign shores might hold a foreign passport yet continue to remain 'Indian' in terms of 'culture, descent, and emotional attachment to the motherland' (Roy, 2008, p.230). Saroja Erraguntla who lived and worked at an American multinational corporation and technology company for many years, before returning to India in 2004, drew both on her position as a professional IT woman, and as a member of an elite transnational class to reconcile the 'global' with the 'Indian'. She possessed the appropriate class and social capital, and as a result, was very comfortable with her Indian identity. Simultaneously she embraced American work culture and its social ethos:

"I understood American culture, and I loved the freedom I had as a woman and as an American citizen. Both my husband and I were comfortable in that setting,

we completely belonged there. I lived there for 15 years, and my husband for 17, before returning to India.”

Saroja had moved from Hyderabad to Louisiana in 1989 to study for a Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering, and later, a Masters in Computer Engineering. In 1991, she accepted an offer to work as a hardware engineer specialising in chip design, for a large international firm in Oregon:

“I never felt the need or any pressure to conform, either at my workplace or at social gatherings. Yes, there were little things to get right, like my name for instance - Saroja Erraguntla - my colleagues found it difficult to pronounce it! But I stuck to my original name. If you look at the Chinese and the Vietnamese – they all have long and difficult names, so they adopt an English name to make it easier for others. But I didn’t change it. When people asked me, ‘Do you have a shorter name?’ I’d reply firmly, ‘No. I go by Saroja - Indian names are very phonetic. So please look at the syllables in my name and pronounce it.’ After a while it rolled off their tongues without any problem! I was not flaunting my Indianness, but it is part of me so why hide it?”

Saroja also wore Indian clothes to the office often, which allowed her to inject an element of cultural difference into her everyday workspace. This can also be read as an attempt at asserting her cultural identity:

“I wore Indian kurtis and salwar-kameez* to the office in summer, and during my pregnancy (though not very brightly coloured - didn’t want to draw too much attention to myself). But it was alright, I was accepted just the way I was... I had women coming up to me and admiring my kurtis*!”*

{* kurti - An upper garment worn in the Indian subcontinent by females, similar to the loose collarless shirt known as kurta worn by males; salwar-kameez - a set of light, loose, pleated trousers, usually tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn with a kameez or tunic top, by women in South Asia}.

However, she stopped short of portraying herself as a bearer of Indian culture, preferring instead, to embrace her ‘lived hybridity’ (Dhingra, 2007). This is significant because it indicates that she did not feel coerced into culture shedding; instead, she inhabited her multiple identities with an ease that belies the compulsions of the end-goal of ‘integration’ in migration discourse:

“While I lived there, I made sure that I had both Indian and American friends - I didn’t feel compelled one way or the other to display my Indian identity, or to take it away. I could be both - Indian and American - why not?”

Saroja demonstrated an ability to glide easily between her Indian and American identities, which allows her to negotiate the challenges of acculturation. However, it can be argued this was made possible because of her class mobility, and her association with a global IT industry, and the neo-liberal environment and culturally diverse landscape that came with the turf. Indian IT workers occupy the 'hegemonic upper tier of the global economy' (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.35). Thus, Saroja's freedom to make identity choices in different environments comes from her position of class privilege, and the power equations at work across different global spaces (Massey and Jess, 1995).

This is also borne out by the fact that Saroja did not experience the social separation that is the lot of some of the other Indian H-1B workers. Segregated both at their place of work and living quarters, at the mercy of 'body-shops' (the recruitment agency) with whom they have to negotiate for better living conditions (Chakravartty, 2006, p.36), many Indian IT workers on H-1B visas are not protected from both overt and hidden forms of discrimination, often having to work for longer hours and for less money than 'natives' (ibid., p.38). The immigration status of an H-1B visa holder is a precarious one, their residence in the US is tied to their employment status. The tag of 'highly skilled' worker does not work as a protective shield, though it does serve to elevate the migrant's identity to a level higher than that of unskilled workers from Asia.

As it exists today, the IT skilled worker hierarchy is a deeply stratified one. IT workers from India with advanced knowledge skills are seen to belong overwhelmingly to the upper caste, majority community with English-speaking educated parents, many of whom would have careers in white collar sectors or government service (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Krishna and Brihmadesam, 2006; Upadhya and Vasavi, 2006). Saroja and other Indian immigrants like her in this study, have benefited from the upper-class, upper caste background they hail from, and hold a higher degree of cultural and economic capital. This background, coupled with a postgraduate degree attained in the US, helps them transition more smoothly into permanent resident status, and finally, US citizenship. Almost every one of the 24 chief interviewees in this study, despite having returned to India, continue to hold American, Australian, or other first world country citizenship.

The fact that Saroja held American citizenship, and that she had demonstrated her ability to adapt to the Western work environment, would have undoubtedly served her well in navigating the line between acceptance and discrimination. By encoding her cultural differences in a socially non-

threatening manner, Saroja allowed her 'Indianness' to acquire a new 'cool', drawing upon cultural artefacts to underscore her difference and thus set herself apart from the white mainstream (Maira, 2000; Mani, 2003). However, she was careful to do this in a manner that would not cause dissonance. 'Indianness', or the idea of belonging to India with a defined set of cultural and religious values, and a sense of connection and heritage to a land far away, is thereby transformed into a cultural commodity that is accepted, even celebrated, in the mainstream of American cultural production. It can be produced and reproduced for not just the Western gaze, but also for the Indian cosmopolitan community (Radhakrishnan, 2011). 'Indianness' becomes a highly suitable set of 'cultural norms that are palatable to Western cosmopolitan culture' (ibid., p.5).

Saroja also avoided cultural isolation and crafted her own distinct space of belonging by embracing cultural diversity in her friendship networks. Many Indian professionals in the IT sector in the US have become adept at both differentiating and integrating their ethnic, racial and American identities, depending on whether it is their workspace or personal space. However, while they exercise agency in switching between identities according to the context, it is an emotionally challenging process. Despite their relatively privileged position in society, it cannot be assumed that they occupy idyllic transnational spaces where they are in a position of control over how they are perceived by the receiving community, or that they will not be subjected to processes of exclusion or discrimination. When such an event occurs, an individual might access and flaunt that identity that seems appropriate at that time. In other words, the person might practise 'situational ethnicity', which is premised on the observation that 'particular contexts may determine which of a person's communal identities or loyalties are appropriate at a point in time' (Paden, 1970, p.268).

On occasion, a privileged position or a 'foreign-returned Indian' identity can hamper the process of resettlement into the home country after return migration. One of the returnees in my study, Asha Hegde, found that her American accent and American degrees added up to an image of someone who would not be able to do justice to the Indian educational context. An arts education researcher and practitioner who had worked in the US for over 20 years before returning to India, Asha's motivation to return was fueled by her desire to transform the poor standard of art education in schools in India:

"I wanted to draw attention to the enriching role of art education in facilitating learning, especially in a country like India where you could apply it to teaching under-privileged children. So, I tried to network with people who could help me

achieve this. I'd go to a party and then go over to a group, mask my nervousness, extend my hand, and say Hello, I am so-and-so, and they'd turn to look at me, then turn back to their group and continue talking! That kind of thing I had never experienced in the States...it was baffling. Even in the non-profit sector in India, it is about who you know in order to get heard, and I didn't have any connections when I arrived. My identity as a single woman with an American accent actually put people off! Indian society looks on single women suspiciously"

Asha's reflection on her single woman identity being an area of dissonance must be understood in the context of a society that places the utmost value on marriage as a signifier of approved status (Lamb, 2011). Despite the latitude permitted by class mobility and economic capital, single women in urban India continue to be subjected to age-old prejudices wherein the "unattached woman is a problem to be fixed" (Pinto, 2014, p.247). While the challenges of female singlehood in India are not the focus of this study, it must nevertheless be recognized as a subsumed part of the cultural environment in which return migration to India is contextualised. Changing her strategy, Asha then tried to reach out directly to government schools that admitted children from the poorer sections and her experience was equally difficult:

"I found that the minute I mentioned Columbia University where I had studied, or the work I had done with New York's inner-city schools, their eyes would glaze over. People here look at you, judge you, just by how you speak or look - judge you in just 5 mins. Others, because of their own insecurities, think to themselves - 'does she think she is better than us?'"

The social rejection that Asha experienced could have risen from the fact that she was not seen as a member of the group - belonging to a group confers a special social identity on all its members (Bresnahan et al, 2002, p.172). In-group identity provides both approval and esteem, marking the difference between inclusion and exclusion of the individual. It has also been found in other studies that a person with an accent that is unlike one's own is often perceived as 'different' (Bresnahan and Kim, 1993; Giles et al., 1987); accents can function as markers of identity in speech (Moyer, 2013; Sung, 2016). In a paper on racial microaggressions directed at Asian international students in Canada, the authors refer to the immense pressure that students undergo to match their manner of speech to the dominant culture (Houshmand et al, 2014). Asha's experience in India is perhaps a similar one. Eventually Asha found that by downplaying her US education, sometimes not even mentioning it, and 'Indianising' her accent, her ideas were heard in some quarters, and she could break into the closed circle of non-profit education providers.

However, Asha continues to find the process of constantly transitioning between her American and Indian identities when she moves between countries for funding and implementation of her projects, extremely stressful:

"I have this strange feeling that my American identity is slowly being robbed from me. It's ironic - when I was in the US, I used to be a very aggressive activist for the rights of women of colour - for them to be seen and heard. Here in India, I feel a different kind of pressure. The system is still discriminatory. Though I am an Indian, I need to prove my Indian identity through my speech, accent, and dress. I was in the UK for a while as a child, so I acquired a bit of a British accent. When I was in the US people felt I had more of an Indian accent than British, but here in India, they feel I speak with an American accent... on the whole, now it's a displaced accent. This whole thing about suppressing traces of my American accent is troubling, makes me wonder...if you can't accept me for who I am, then how long can I continue here? The future becomes uncertain."

Navigating Bias

Narratives of immigrants often flag the role of unconscious cognitive biases in the production of stereotypes. As persons of colour in a receiving society, they could be made conscious of their racialized identity in public spaces. While the participants in this study do not make any mention of being victims of systemic racism or being subjected to anti-immigrant rhetoric calling, such as immigrants being told to 'go back to where they came from' (Carling et al, 2015), some of the accounts reflect the discrimination they have been exposed to.

For Maria Koshy who was barely 22 and had just started working as a technology analyst in India when she married Stephen, a software engineer working at one of America's biggest medical centres, the years in the US were a mixed bag of experiences. In her first year, she was employed at an American multinational technology corporation; she moved later to a better job at the medical centre where Stephen worked, when a vacancy became available. The couple fulfilled specific labour expectations, blended into the workplace with their fluency in English, educational attainment, and adaptability to working conditions. Maria and Stephen were perceived as members of the 'model minority' in the US (a term that unfortunately suffers from a lack of nuanced representation).

The term 'model minority' refers to a minority community which despite a lack of resources, through sheer hard work, achieves 'middle or higher-class status along broad statistical measures, such as income levels, education levels, and labour force participation' (Dhingra, 2016, p.210). Asian Americans, and particularly Indian Americans, are seen as representing the model minority.

The identity of this community is tied to a set template of pliant, even docile behaviour, exhibiting an unflinching focus on academic and professional achievement, a respect for authority and the right 'family values'. The notion that people can shape their mobility if they have the right culture is a primary premise of the model minority stereotype (Lee, 2009). However, the very concept of identification based on the assumption that belonging to a certain culture guarantees successful outcomes is flawed, and it has been met with criticism by academics, who denounce it as a racist myth (Sakamoto, Takei, and Woo, 2012).

The model minority theory advances the idea that Asian professional migrants find the process of incorporation into the local communities easier than others, that it will be a smooth process free of exclusion and racism (Kunz, 2016, p.94). Yet, this assumption must be problematized, as the reality on the ground often follows a different script. Slipped in between the banal experiences of migrants in local settings in the receiving society are grainier pictures of bias and 'racial microaggression' (Pierce, 1970; Sue et al., 2007). The term refers to "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce et al., 1978, p. 66). These can take the form of vague, implied, verbal or non-verbal indignities that convey attitudes of prejudice (Houshmand et al, 2014). These may seem innocuous and are not immediately visible in the macro picture of global flows and model minorities. However, studies have repeatedly highlighted instances of cultural intolerance or subtle forms of inhospitality shown to international students (Lee and Rice, 2007).

Maria became conscious of the possibility of 'implicit bias' (Sellers and Shelton, 2003) only when her daughter began attending a private school in her all-white neighbourhood:

"I remember Annie not having many friends in school, she wasn't invited to parties much. Some kids made comments about her skin colour. We were surrounded by doctors and engineers - it was an elite US community filled with whites. Annie felt that she was different, she told me that the other white kids would not include her in their school groups. She would never carry anything but American food in her lunchbox... she wouldn't take out her lunchbox if I packed Indian food. We discussed all this with her teachers, and they made efforts to get her accepted by her classmates. As a mother, I kept on praising her achievements, I was trying to preserve her sense of self-worth. Over weekends, we would socialise with a few Indian families".

Racial discrimination in the form of racial microaggressions or implicit bias are difficult to hold to account because of its subtle, indirect quality (Smedley and Smedley, 2005; Burkard and Knox, 2004), yet it can cause unease and disquiet. In the case of migrants in a receiving society, such behaviour could lead to them seeking out avenues for belonging through religious institutions or cultural societies. Churches and temples play an important role in not just providing a sense of community, but facilitating a social connection with co-ethnics (Hirschman, 2004). Every Sunday, Maria and her family drove for two hours from Rochester to Minneapolis so that they could attend a church which had a service in their native language Malayalam, spoken in the state of Kerala in south India:

“There weren’t many Indians in Minnesota or Rochester back then. Also, we wanted to visit a church, where Malayalees visited. It was like a Kerala party, with traditional Malayalee food and all of us wearing south Indian sarees! You could hear people chattering away in Malayalam all around us! That was a great feeling - you didn’t miss India then. We’d feel like we were back at Sunday service in our native place in Kottayam! The colourful clothes, the food served, children running around shouting - all so familiar. We have a cousin named Babychetan who says that he lives in Minneapolis only because there are so many Indians around.”

The loss of familiar sounds and sights can weigh heavily on immigrants in the receiving society. Things that were once taken for granted such as casual phone calls, social interaction with relatives and friends, food customs, rituals, even *“the heat and dust and bargaining in the bazaar”* as Maria describes it, become prized memories.

Studies show that many Indian immigrants develop strategies to deal with racialization by identifying more strongly with India (Rajagopal, 1995), or by drifting towards residential areas that have a large component of Indian communities. While Indian communities in America can be found in large and micro clusters across the country, depending on factors such as income, educational attainment, and occupation, many of the highly skilled Indian IT professional migrants live in southern and northern California (Chakravorty et al, 2017). Florida, California, Texas, North Carolina and New York lead in the list of favoured cities for technology immigrants (Schwartz, 2019), and San Francisco follows closely. Seattle has also seen major tech companies like Microsoft, Amazon and Google set up hubs in the area. In the San Jose area, migrants born outside the U.S. account for a remarkable 71 percent of skilled workers in IT occupations, and 40% of these workers come from India (Balk, 2018).

Ameera Ali and her husband Aarif, who is a software engineer, lived in San Jose during their 11-year residence in the US:

"We lived in a beautiful Eichler community in San Jose. It was not a typical Indian residential pocket, like the ones you see in Silicon Valley - it was very diverse. Our neighbours were very friendly. We met often and had meals together. I wouldn't eat pork, that was the only reservation I expressed. They were okay with that. Really liberal. I was a brown Muslim in an all-white neighbourhood, but they accepted us as regular people - so where you live in the US really matters."*

{ * Eichler community - Eichler homes exemplify Modernist architecture that has come to be known as 'California Modern'}.

Despite her confident assertion of self, and her American citizenship, Ameera expresses relief that they were accepted as 'regular' people:

"I broke through their biases. Someone actually said to me that 'if you hadn't told us that you are a Muslim I wouldn't have known'."

Her words - 'broke through their biases' while acknowledging their surprise about her being a Muslim, suggest a keen awareness of her racial and religious identity being silently, and sometimes not so silently, interrogated in public spaces:

"Whenever I went into the shops in the US, I always felt a little anxious...like I was an outsider. So many times, the shopkeepers used to follow me around while I was browsing inside the store, thinking that I am an Indian, I am a brown woman, and I may not have the capacity to buy. These little things, the indignities, used to hurt me, made me feel I didn't belong."

What was Ameera looking for? What kind of validation did she seek, what would have made her feel comfortable in her own skin? She explains:

"I never felt at home in the US. Can't say why exactly. Back in my native place in Kerala... I remember how, so many times, I would just drop in at the local store and pick up something and if I was short of cash, they'd say 'pay later'... we were that free with them. They trusted you, they knew you. And that made me feel I belonged..."

Ameera's statement also reveals the innate security she feels in surroundings that are tied up with her familial roots. She was pleased that the shopkeeper 'knew' her, she felt she 'belonged' there. This is reflective of the way familiarity with a place can generate feelings of belonging, and how that sense of belonging to the place can become intertwined with a sense of self (Easthope, 2009). An attachment to place, especially to one's native home, can merge

with one's sense of identity (Dovey, 1985). Yet, when questioned directly about whether practices of 'othering' had been directed at her whilst she was in the US, Ameera who now lives in India, hedges her response:

"See, it's not like I faced active discrimination in the US. I worked in PR, it was a very open-minded community - I didn't face any racism at my workplace. My kids did face some problems at school because they were dark-skinned. Once their teacher asked all the students about their nationality and my son said 'American' and she immediately contradicted him firmly, and said that he was Indian, not American. He came home and said - 'Mom, I thought I was American!' I told him that he is American but also Indian, so he is an Indian American. I told him, and my other son, to be careful not to respond to any provocation. I didn't want it to become a big issue."

The strategy of not responding, to avoid a potentially uncomfortable or distressing situation in the future, coheres with Ameera's anxieties over notions of exclusion. Within the context of this particular social encounter, Ameera wanted her son to present himself in a manner that would diffuse the situation and make it non-confrontational. Conceptions of belonging are intricately worked into the fabric of access and inclusion - questions over belonging arise when "we feel that there are a range of spaces, places, locales and identities that we feel we do not and cannot belong to, in the sense that we cannot gain access, participate or be included within" (Anthias, 2000, p.8).

Ameera often interrogates her own experiences in the US, and frames them as a struggle with the behavioural codes embedded into the social ethos of the receiving society:

"I personally did not have any problem being accepted as a Muslim. Yes, the general public does carry this mental image of an oppressed Muslim woman in a burkha - that's how she is portrayed on television. But they could see that I was an independent woman. I never wore a hijab or a headscarf, I always wore Western clothes. But wearing a hijab does not mean that you cannot have a normal conversation with someone! Ironically, one American colleague who had visited India once, loved wearing Indian kurtis, and she actually asked me why I didn't. When my siblings and I were growing up in north Kerala, my family allowed us to wear what we wanted. But some people in the US - they judge you by what you wear."

It is not quite clear as to whether Ameera wore Western clothes out of choice or to project a certain self, or whether it represented her desire not to stand out. Her frustration at what she perceived as the judgmental attitude of American society is evident:

"People are so defined and judged by their dress - just because Muslim women cover their heads...they are judging you already! You may be a fanatic Christian but because you dress like everyone else, people cannot make out that you are a fanatic. But there, just because of the dress, a person is judged."

Ameera's experience of the essentialization of cultural and religious identity raises questions about 'belonging, identity formation and migrancy (embracing complex migrant subjectivities)' (Lawson, 2000, p.174). The struggle for Ameera was not just having to deal with racial and religious bias, but to simultaneously negotiate assimilation and marginalisation, even as she held on to a core sense of identity.

In terms of social perception in the US, both Ameera and Saroja would be placed at the upper end of the 'model minority', belonging as they do, to the class of highly educated, highly skilled, and mobile Indian Americans. This allows them access to social approval, acceptance, and opportunity. Clearly, though, Ameera's membership in the model minority did not prevent her from being keenly aware of racism in her environment. As a migrant subject, she sometimes experienced ambivalence, exclusion, and rupture:

"Though I never felt victimised. I didn't have to hide my identity. But I wanted to go back to India. Almost immediately after the oath-taking ceremony where we became citizens of the US, we left for India".

Narratives such as Ameera's cast a light on how migrant experiences are 'framed by systematic processes of privilege and discrimination'. (Lawson, 2000, p.174). Ten years after she returned to India, Ameera says that her memories of feeling disconnected from American society are fading, that her perceptions of 'othering' have been softened by time. The little everyday instances that mattered to her while she lived in the US, now seem less troubling, and the prospect of returning to the US is viewed as a possibility:

"They just need to get to know you, that's all. Not that we have any plans of returning right now, but we don't want to give up our American citizenship. We had deliberately taken citizenship, anticipating that our children would go back one day. My older son has already gone to California for his undergraduate studies, my other son will go too. And it is just easier to visit them in the future, and travel everywhere in the world on American passports."

Meanwhile, Ameera and Aarif have settled into their lives in Whitefield, Bangalore, and Ameera has plunged into civic activism.

Elite Civic Activism

Realising that her expertise in Public Relations could prove valuable in drawing attention to Bangalore's perennial problem of 'foaming lakes', Ameera began working with a community of volunteers called 'Whitefield Rising' shortly after she returned to India:

"There's this issue of the 'foaming lakes' in Bangalore which is about the pollution of water bodies and the accumulating sewage in the waters - the chemicals in the lakes make them foam and spill over onto the streets. A few of us got together to find practical solutions - we wanted to improve living conditions in Bangalore. I always had the inclination, and I had the necessary skills, so why not. Now the movement has grown, with hundreds of volunteers! Bangalore has the highest number of citizen activists in the country, and I am one of them now, and I have a sense of achievement for sure."

Even prior to their return, many of the returnees in this study wished to return and make a difference in their home country. Phipps (2022) notes that return migration can involve the *desire to 'bring something back when you return that is more than money' (p. 25). Indeed, my participants envisaged themselves as catalysts in sparking change at the grassroots level, by addressing civic issues of water, electricity, pollution, and waste, thus embarking on an agenda of change outside the state system. As Ameera puts it, returnees like her possess the required global exposure to advanced forms of governance which India sorely needs, as well as the requisite knowledge-set to achieve their goal of '*working for the betterment of this country*'.

Similarly, Asha Hegde's return to India was partly influenced by her many years of experience working with children from marginalised communities in Harlem, New York providing art education, and partly by her own unhappy memories of the schooling system in India:

"I desperately wanted to change things here, bring about educational reform. I had personally experienced the lack of sensitivity in the classroom while growing up here, the rote-learning, the apathetic approach to tapping the inner talent of a child. I had no sense of who I was until I left this country - it was extremely demoralising. I wanted to help change that."

Asha hoped to build a bridge between education and the arts, develop the curriculum and transform the classroom experience:

"In Indian schools, arts education research doesn't exist, because art is seen merely as a recreational activity. Children are given a piece of paper and crayon, and an outline, and they are told to colour within the lines - keeps them busy,

but has zilch educational value. Maybe it was the adrenaline rushing through me at the thought of going back and starting something. If it doesn't work out, what's the big deal? There are many other opportunities that I can go back to in the US."

Despite facing problems breaking into the 'right circles', making friends, and having to navigate life in a patriarchal society that disapproves of a single woman living on her own in the city, Asha has managed to establish her non-profit arts education venture in Bangalore, and is currently working with several schools in Bangalore city as well rural Karnataka, designing programs that use arts as a channel for cognitive development in schoolchildren:

"We are now catering to over 3000 students in 18 schools and the potential to grow is endless. Do I regret coming back? As a professional, there's no regret. But in a personal sense, I am unsure. I still miss my friends in the US, the open-mindedness. I am 45 now. When I am 55 or 60, and I still don't have my own family (I chose not to get married - my friends were my family), I am constantly thinking - can I continue to live here? The one reassuring thing is that my work is making a positive impact."

Rashmi Thomas, who volunteers to teach Mathematics and English to secondary students in government schools, also finds that the charitable sector in India offers many opportunities "to do good". Rashmi returned to India with her family in 2005, after spending over 10 years in the US and Japan. Her husband Joy Thomas's career trajectory had set the pace for their travels, and they finally made the trek back to India when Joy was offered an opportunity by his US-based venture capital firm to set up a branch office in Bangalore:

"I also volunteer at an institution for battered women and find it quite bruising emotionally, but very satisfying. I am helping people less fortunate than me. Like most families within this gated complex, I pay my helpers very well – there's the cook, the 'bai' for cleaning and dusting, the driver, the gardener, and the girl who helps me with the children sometimes. So many poor families are being supported – that's a good feeling".

Both Ameera and Rashmi can be seen as part of the 'return of innovation' group of returnees (Cerase, 1974), a term that refers to migrants who have spent a fair length of time abroad, have acquired new skills, and now perceive themselves as 'agents of change'. Knowledge transfer and new ideas are the tools to work with. The end goal is "making a contribution to social change" as Rashmi describes it. Undoubtedly, in order to make an impact in the development sector, returning migrants must possess the necessary social and economic capital,

besides skill sets, and most importantly, must harbour the desire to bring about change (Thomas-Hope, 1999). The high-skilled returnees in this study meet these criteria. However, this form of voluntary contribution by elite returnees can also be critiqued for sometimes adopting a top-down approach to civic engagement.

There is also the possibility that the charitable work they engage in may not entirely be driven by altruistic motives. Through her unpaid labour in urban environmentalism, Ameera can be said to be side-stepping a formal role in state apparatus, though she exerts a degree of influence in meaningful change-making. Though outside the system, she is also inside the system as she carves out her own identity as a citizen activist. By inserting herself into the vision of transforming India, Rashmi is possibly negotiating her position in the receiving society and finding a channel to establish post-return belonging.

It is also possible that Rashmi's encounters with ageism in the Indian workplace, which limited her chances of getting back into the workforce, might have influenced her decision to do charitable work. It has been noted in the literature that trailing spouses find it challenging to find suitable channels to apply their professional skills given the constant moving to new countries, which could have a negative impact on their psychosocial wellbeing (Vlase, 2013; Andreason and Kinneer, 2005). While there are few open conversations in India, about the disparate treatment of older and younger workers, or about gender discrimination at the workplace, career mobility for women has traditionally been impaired by hiring practices that value youth over experience:

"The thing is, even with my education and work experience, it is not easy for someone of my age to get back into the corporate world in India, and for women it is even more tough. I am competing with freshers out of management colleges! Ageism is a big problem here. It is so much easier in the US where you can upgrade your skills and get back into the workforce. That is one regret I have about returning to India. I might go back and do my doctoral studies, if we return to the US one day."

- Rashmi Thomas

It may also be conjectured that the value-laden investment of personal time and effort into charitable work without material recompense offers a way to extricate oneself from a state of uneasiness at the inequalities of the society these highly paid professionals have returned to. Internal transfers from their parent companies in the US facilitated the move back to India for professionals like Amaresh Gollamudi, Joy Thomas, Mihir Advani, and Oliver Joseph. They

returned without any hesitation because the postings came with “*a comfortable expat package that was definitely higher than what is being offered at a local level.*” A parallel can be found in the literature on expatriates on overseas postings, wherein the self-identification of themselves as members of a privileged group may cause a sense of considerable guilt and unease. In her study of Euro-American expats in Indonesia, Fechter points out that being categorised as an expatriate by their company, allows for a relinquishing of responsibility for their relatively more luxurious lifestyle and privileges, which come with the job. Soldered as they are within the mechanisms of global capitalism, they cannot be held accountable for structural inequalities (Fechter, 2007, p.3).

For many returnees, the workplace becomes a platform for knowledge-sharing and implementation of global practices that will drive change in work culture and standards of production. However, such attempts are not always met with unqualified approval. For Amaresh Gollamudi, the process of ‘vernacularization’ (Levitt and Merry, 2009) whereby the ideas and approaches of another context are adapted to the local setting has proved to be a challenge:

“India has given me a lot, and I really want to give something back. I tried to introduce best practices here in India, but employees here are not interested in that, they just want quick promotions. I’ve been trying to establish the importance of punctuality and sticking to systems. But it’s very difficult changing the old India, there are set ways of doing things. They have no concept of time, corruption is everywhere, and the politics within the management cadre is too much! I had to manage the delivery of technology services to our clients in North America, Canada and Europe, but there is no proper coordination between the government and the bureaucracy. The laws are there, the enforcement is zero. We need all that to change in this country, so I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to that. That satisfaction goes beyond the pay packet.”

Clearly, the sense of fulfilment that returnees like Rashmi, Asha, Amaresh, and the others derive from their efforts in driving change in the home country has brought them an enhanced self-awareness that reinforces notions of belonging. Social relations serve a purpose - they help in reinforcing identity and recognition (Lin, 1999). Ameera feels acknowledged in her society, she is assured of her ‘worthiness as a member of a social group sharing similar interests’ (Kuschminder, 2017, p.141). She is thus able to reclaim her place in a society she had moved away from for many years:

“When I move around in Whitefield, people know me... The staff at the police station, and the locals call me for help sometimes. They know me because of the work we are doing as a group. That’s important to me – the fact that they know me locally. I feel like a change-maker in India. And that has really helped me to blossom, I’ve become more confident. It makes me feel I belong.”

Conclusion

It is becoming increasingly evident that national boundaries need not be contiguous with the boundaries of social fields (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Migrants maintain kinship networks that stretch back and forth between home and host countries, thus constructing transnational identities for themselves. The looping rhythm of cross-border connectivity weaves ‘an illusion of togetherness and belonging’ (Kędra, 2021, p.2877). A simultaneous belonging, or a sense of not quite belonging fully to either place, that creates a form of synchronous belonging. Upon return to the home society, returnees appear to be experiencing what I term ‘liminal return’ which encapsulates the innate emotional ambivalence towards resettlement, the desire and the proclivity to balance movement with stasis.

Lata Gollamudi and Manoj Nair represent the many transmigrant families embedded in kinship networks, keeping notions of ‘home’ alive through acts of cultural reproduction in the host country. Where the natural community cannot be ‘renewed’, it must be ‘reconstructed’ (Werbner, 2014, p.224). Culture is thus rendered as a field of sociality, it is not limited to being ‘a badge of identity’ but confers ‘role and agency’ on the transmigrant (ibid., p.236). Linked notionally to the idea of belonging, and repeatedly used in the narratives of the returnees in this study is the term ‘Indian culture’. It is both non-specific and all-embracing, and reflects the manner in which upwardly mobile Indian migrant professionals in the host country create cultural meanings for themselves and enact ‘appropriately Indian’ (Radhakrishnan, 2011) cultural narratives that loop back into a quest for identity.

In the many diverse and multi-sited imaginaries of home, ‘home’ is often valorized in nostalgia. Manoj’s situated practice of domesticity in his home in Chelmsford, in tandem with his sister’s virtual co-presence, can be interpreted as migrant homemaking, where home is experienced virtually - ‘it locates lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space’ (Mallet, 2004, p.62). Manoj experiences ‘home’ as a ‘process’ wherein the domestic practice makes ‘home’ meaningful (Cieraad, 2001; Miller, 2001).

Home can also be understood as a significant type of 'place' (Easthope, 2004, p.135). The concept of place anchors and connects the physical dwelling with the social, cultural, and emotive world of the individual, which then provides a scaffolding for identity. Though physically removed from his homeland, Manoj sustains the emotional connection with his family back in the homeland by incorporating a virtual dimension into the act. Thus, the access to multiple platforms of digital technology has transformed the way people 'do' emotions (Madianou and Miller, 2012). The accounts of the returnees in this study reveal the manner in which migrants from the Global South negotiate socio-spatial and emotional relationships using polymedia, and how, in fact, they manage to 'deintensify emotional interaction' (King-O'Riain, 2014, p.257), by engaging in virtual emotional exchange over hour-long periods. However, there is insufficient data available on this, pointing to a gap in the literature.

A recurring theme in the narratives of resettlement in this study is the desire to *"give back something to society, to do something for India"*. This form of activism also interlaces with discourses of neo-liberal urban development that circulate within the global circle of diasporic Indians, where the goal is to help transform India into a 'world-class city' (Upadhyay, 2013, p.142). While the desire to bring about positive change may rise from an ideological framework, it can also be critiqued as moral grandstanding by an elite community that speaks from above. Thus, the framing of 'a progressive civic politics' can also be understood as 'elite civic activism' (Gupta, 2018, p.4).

The accounts of the participants in this study provide glimpses of their 'subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are, and desire to become' (Brown, 2015, p.20). These complex 'self-perceived identities' could be 'existing, temporary, recent, or developing' (Gomes, 2017) and are often reconciled into a fluid identity in both receiving and home societies. Studies show the ease with which many Indian migrant professionals in the US become adept at differentiating and integrating their ethnic, racial, and American identities depending on whether it is their workspace or personal space. Saroja Erraguntla actively worked at reconciling her Indian and American identities to claim her own space of belonging. While undoubtedly aided by the cultural capital she possessed, and by the relative privilege that marked her status as a highly paid member of the global software elite, she asserted her agency in moulding and enacting a self that simultaneously straddled the 'Indian' and the 'global'.

Nevertheless, while transmigrants like Saroja, Maria and Ameera successfully navigated dual social, cultural, and economic norms in their everyday lives in the receiving society, they were not immune to racial microaggression or perceived bias. Though they adopted various strategies of coping, including non-confrontational behaviour or taking recourse to alternate spaces of access and inclusion, it can be surmised that their encounters with racist provocation perhaps remain submerged within the layers of their mobility experiences.

Meanwhile, highly skilled returning migrants like them continue to articulate the 'new mobilities paradigm', going beyond the imagery of fixed encapsulated terrains for social processes (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.209). The narratives in this thesis illustrate the 'multi-vocal, fragmented and hybrid' nature of identity (Gabriel, 2004, p.110). Oliver Joseph, for instance, does not see himself as having returned permanently; his words suggest that Rita and he are transient migrants who embrace a hybridity of identity. The uncertainty of that condition does not appear to trouble him. He does not denounce it as an unfavourable life-course prospect. Rather, his self-perceived identity is that of a highly skilled individual with transferable skills, someone who has developed the requisite skills to adapt to any country he wishes to live in. Thus, Oliver perceives his mobility (and the accompanying uncertainty) as an inherent part of his 'global Indian' identity which he interprets as an opportunity, not as a liability.

The migrant professionals in this study now work from Bangalore and live with their families in affluent neighbourhoods. Yet, they simultaneously inhabit transnational social fields that help them stay connected to the Western societies they were once part of. The continuing of transnational practices such as availing of cultural exchange opportunities for their children, retaining links with friends and colleagues in their global networks, retaining their foreign citizenship, or taking insurance in the previous host country, helps returnees negotiate local belonging without relinquishing their ties to previously lived spaces. In the subjectivities they cultivate can be found 'transnationally rooted forms of belonging' (De Bree et al, 2010, p.507). Recent work on time and temporalities posits that while migration can be imagined as creating futures and building on hope, it can also be 'reflective of absent or uncertain futures' (Griffiths et al., 2013, p.2013). However, the findings of my study suggest that within the context of voluntary return migration by highly skilled Indian professionals, uncertain futures are embraced as horizons of possibilities.

Chapter 5

Gated Communities: Living in a 'Bubble'

Return to the 'New India'

"Even before coming back to India, we had decided we will live in a gated complex - my husband did a couple of recce trips just to check out the options in Bangalore. Because we realised that a GC is where you'd find people like us. People who've travelled like us, lived abroad, had global exposure. It's a natural desire, no? To want to be with like-minded people... Our neighbours are like us - their educational backgrounds, their lifestyle, civic sense, their connections with the US and Europe. I think we are a little different from the locals. Our children attend international schools, and almost all of them are going to go abroad for higher studies. So, we understand each other, we share the same interests. There is a whole community of both Indians and foreigners living here who have come on overseas postings. That's why we chose a gated community - it makes you feel at home".

- Rashmi Thomas

Rashmi and Joy Thomas moved to Boston in the US in 1995, right after they were married, as he already had a job there in a software company. Rashmi had a Business Management degree from India, then applied and gained admission to an Ivy League university in the US to do a master's program in Public Policy. Later, she moved with her husband to California, then to Japan, and back to the US, following Joy's career path. The children had come by then, and Rashmi chose to quit working for a while and be a full-time homemaker. It was in 2006 that they decided to return to India to look after their ageing parents, and an autistic sibling who needed medical care; a decision made easier by the fact that Thomas was offered an opportunity by his US-based venture capital firm to set up a branch office in Bangalore. Today they live at Belle Green Paradise, an upscale gated community complex in Whitefield, Bangalore, ensconced within a community of returnees with similar migration trajectories, who self-identify as 'Non-Resident Indian', 'international', 'global Indian', or 'cosmopolitan'.

This chapter examines the ways in which returnees attempt to re-establish ties with the home society, albeit with a degree of separation. While they acknowledge the contradictions and inequalities of India, they do not embrace it, preferring instead to live with people 'like'

themselves. The 'home' that these migrants are returning to, transcends the brick and mortar of their own physical home to the larger canvas of a 'New India' (Upadhyay, 2013, p.204) - one that merges the glorious past and ancient culture with a modern and progressive future. Thus 'New India' is linked with the idea of the 'global' (ibid., p.204). In the mind of the returnee, the old city of Bangalore is transformed into an attractive, mobile, global city.

Taking up residence in exclusive gated communities, they are separated spatially from the reality of the 'old' India, dwelling instead in spaces of in-betweenness. Gated enclaves represent 'pockets of prosperity and islands of well-being' in the country and coexist with substandard housing and absolute poverty (Nayyar, 2012, p. xiii). I draw on the lived experiences of the participants in this study to illustrate how the gated community becomes a spatial expression of identity construction for the returnee, while simultaneously deepening the lines of social stratification in a city and a nation marked by socio-economic inequalities. I take note of how the gated community serves as a site of mobility convergence (Bal et al, 2017, p.15), and facilitates place-based forms of solidarity and belonging for the inmates.

Rashmi and Joy Thomas intended their stay in India to be a temporary one, for a few years at the most, but life events have ensured otherwise. She attributes the decision to a desire to remain close to their families 'for as long as we can', even though Joy's head office offered them the opportunity to move back to the US once the Bangalore office was up and running. As Constant and Massey (2003) point out, returnees to the homeland often prioritise familial and cultural considerations over monetary or career advancement opportunities. From a life-course perspective (Lauer and Wong, 2010), it appears that many migrants link their return to India with their age and the stage of life they are at, which is associated with fulfilling one's filial duties, besides enabling access to cultural resources for their offspring who represent the generation to come (Ray, 2013; Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003). The changed economic circumstances of the home country which is perceived to be catching up in economic development (Qin, 2014), is another compelling motivation for return.

From 'Brain Drain' to 'Brain Gain': India's Silicon Valley

Intracompany transfers between countries by employees of transnational corporations account for a significant volume of movement (Khadria, 2004). The appeal of the 'new' India finds resonance in this shift from 'brain drain' to 'brain gain', as a growing number

of software engineers return to the cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad (Chacko, 2007, p.131). Almost every one of the participants in this study left India in order to pursue higher education and use that as a route to acquire well-paid jobs, and eventually, citizenship in the receiving countries. Their spouses either adopted the same route, or left India after their marriage, and subsequently became employees and citizens. By the time they returned, all of them had used the time abroad to accumulate skills that placed them in the bracket of highly valued 'global workers' (Bhatt, 2018), and most of them returned to well- paid, prestigious positions in Bangalore, either on a transfer from the parent company, or making a new start in a multinational firm offering a 'wage premium' (Varshney, 2013). Reportedly, almost 95% of international companies in Software Technology Parks (STPs) in Bangalore are being managed by highly skilled Indian returnees with global exposure (Kapur, 2002).

Founded in 1537, Bangalore, the state capital of Karnataka, was a well-known centre of textile and silk production (Dittrich, 2007). Industrialisation started during the early twentieth century. In the post-independence period, it transitioned from being a small city in 1951 with a populace of just 7,86,343, to a large urban city with modern infrastructure in 2001 with a populace of over 5.7 million, which rose to 9.6 million in 2011 (Chandramouli and General, 2011). Currently, the population of Bangalore is estimated to be over 12.3 million (World Population Review, 2020). Once known as the 'Garden City' due to its profusion of green spaces and 'tree-lined streets' (Chacko and Varghese, 2009, p.59; Sudheera, 2008, p.119), it was later hailed as a 'Pensioner's Paradise' (Mukherjee and Chanda, 2012, p.401).

It was only in the late 1990s that the character of the city changed, from a comfortable, middle-class ambience with an economy that centred around its public sector enterprises in 'aeronautics, space research, radar and remote sensing, military equipment, and factory tool-making' (Goldman, 2011, p.235), to an expanding megacity hosting one of the most rapidly growing IT clusters in the world (Sonderegger and Taube, 2010). This was partly brought about by the fortuity of Bangalore being an existing hub of engineering, technology, and research institutions of an extremely high standard, which facilitated the generation of an ever-increasing pool of highly skilled labour. This urban production of space brought about the transformation of the city of Bangalore. Such was its metamorphosis, particularly with the proliferation of new glittering spaces of consumption and production, that it captured the imagination of the media, the political class, and technocrats alike.

Currently, Bangalore has been hailed variously as ‘a beacon of the globalising world’ (Sudheera, 2008, p.137), the ‘Electronics Capital of India’ (Dittrich, 2007, p.45), and as the ‘Silicon Valley of India’ (Heitzman, 2003, p.57). Additionally, Bangalore along with Hyderabad, are often referred to as ‘world cities’ (Chacko, 2007, p.132) in recognition of their importance as global IT hubs and as cities of choice for highly skilled transnationals (Chacko, 2007, p.132). A world city is one that provides ‘advanced producer services’ (Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network, 1999) and is not just a crucial node in the worldwide network of global economic and cultural flows (Taylor, 2004), but also provides a cosmopolitan environment informed by broadmindedness and diversity (Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Yusuf and Wu, 2002).

A World City?

However, in truth, the epithet ‘world city’ sits awkwardly on a metropolis like Bangalore, governed as it is by an unwieldy and constantly vacillating state apparatus. Although Bangalore has seen accelerated growth in various other sectors such as aviation, space, biotechnology, and education, besides IT; its infrastructural growth has not kept pace. The city is increasingly burdened by an inefficient sewage system and seemingly interminable traffic gridlocks. Resources like roads, public transport, water supply, energy, land, and housing, have proved to be erratic in supply and quality. The result is an uneven development of civic infrastructure and facilities to support the density of software and service industries, financial complexes, and global headquarters of multinational companies. The lack of coordination between the core agencies tasked with the implementation of plans for urban development has proved disillusioning for several major service industries headquartered in Bangalore (Dittrich, 2007). Nevertheless, the global ‘investment frenzy’ continues, even if it has led to ‘conflict-ridden urban development’ (Halbert and Rouanet, 2014, p.140).

Rita Joseph, who returned to India hoping to restart her career as an entrepreneur, expresses her disappointment over Bangalore’s badly maintained infrastructure, growing slums, and lack of amenities. Though Rita and her husband Oliver live in a penthouse in the Koramangala area, they find themselves navigating a swarm of traffic snarls to and from their workplace:

“There was a lot of expectation, I was looking forward to working again after so many years of just being a homemaker while in the US. But Bangalore has deteriorated so much, it was a shock. Suddenly, roads are blocked - one day it is open, the next day you are diverted to another road. There is no accountability.

There are laws but nobody is implementing them. But now that I have set up my fitness business, I must live with it."

Oliver adds:

"It may be called Silicon City, but it has a long way to go before it can be called a world-class city! So many flyovers, so much construction and unfinished projects though they say it is about upgrading. No proper planning, no genuine intent."

Urban Oases and Islands of Privilege

However, highly skilled returnees like Oliver and Rita, and the others in this study, have their own private retreat from the grind and grime of the city. Swanky, self-contained apartment-complexes with large grounds, and service apartment complexes for wealthy Non-Resident Indians have sprung up, both close to the modern city centre and in the newly developed, high-income residential areas of the urban mid-periphery (Dittrich, 2007). Dominating the landscape are gated residential complexes in the Euro-American architectural style that have been blossoming on the peripheries of cities like Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad over the last 20 years. Promoted as an exclusive living environment, these gated complexes are being projected as idyllic living spaces, providing its residents with 'not just a home, but a ready-made community' (Chacko and Varghese, 2009, p.57). Aggressive advertising and marketing campaigns in Bangalore and Hyderabad targeted at Non-Resident Indian (NRI) returnees, serve up glossy images of independent villas, multi-storeyed houses and landscaped gardens within gated complexes, adding a new element to the existing cityscape. These advertisements carry messages about place and identity (Chacko and Varghese, 2009), often tying distinctive architectural designs and styles to notions of high socioeconomic class and idealised localities (Stobart, 2003). One real estate company used the headline 'couture community' in its advertising to market their Italian-style villas inside a gated complex to the discerning elite community (Bal et al., 2017, p.20). The participants in this study collectively represent the kind of elite community that the above-mentioned advertising campaigns target.

Each sprawling gated complex or GC, as the residents call it, runs into several acres of land, filled with broad winding roads flanked by a variety of trees, mango groves, small gardens, and outdoor seating areas. Most of these gated complexes are carefully designed to replicate the look and feel of Western suburbia (Upadhyaya, 2013), complete with the classic American front lawns and endless sidewalks where kids can cycle freely, sloped roofs and open spaces.

Amenities range from swimming pools, jogging tracks, badminton courts, a visitors' parking area, medical centres, and shopping arcades, to round the clock security, ATMs, broadband connectivity, fire safety measures, piped gas, and solar power. Some GCs include a gym, yoga rooms, a community hall, a food court, and an auditorium.

Poised between remembering and forgetting, straddling real and imagined worlds, several returnees resort to place-making (Tuan, 2003), incorporating architectural elements native to the houses in the UK or the US into their new homes such that their homes resonate with memories from elsewhere:

"We don't want to forget about our time overseas. We've even brought some of our American furniture and little artefacts back to India! If you look at our family room – that entire furniture set is from the US. Even the idea of a family room, and a large kitchen where we can both cook and eat - both ideas were adopted from our lives in the US. So, mentally we are still in one lane there, but we've been trying to adopt the good of that place and live like that here. We also have a WhatsApp group of friends from both the US and India, and we share our experiences. And at least once a year we go for a holiday back to the US, it was our home for so many years after all."

- Rashmi Thomas

'Home' here can be interpreted as the site where a history linked with past landscapes is refracted through the material artefacts in the domestic sphere (Samuel, 1994). The desire to cling to erstwhile threads of identity is manifested in the way they seek to recreate spaces that are consonant with the past, such that the new home spaces become 'portmanteaus of cultural memory' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). In this manner, returnees slip into their new lives in their land of origin, even as they stay connected to their old lives in another part of the world, albeit unconsciously. A synchrony of existence wherein layers of identity overlap and co-exist.

While transnational practices such as cultural reproduction and maintaining kinship networks occupied a central place in their lives in the host country, after their return to India, other transnational practices continue. Frequent travel to global locations on site visits, annual vacations at foreign locales or in the country they were living in previously, ensuring that their children pursue their higher studies overseas, retaining ownership of property in the US or Australia, maintaining old friendship and professional networks through digital and social media - all of it ensures that transnational ties are kept alive.

"We chose to live in a GC because it reminds us of our old life in an American suburb, where our kids would just run freely out of the house and start playing in the sunshine. If we had picked a normal apartment in the centre of the city, they would have to play in a small compound which is both a parking area, and playground. Lots of outsiders, and cars just zipping in and out recklessly. Our family loves playing football, and throwball. We couldn't have done that if we weren't living in a GC. There is also a big pool here at the clubhouse. My kids used to swim competitively in the US, so they love the pool. Outside, there are many things we cannot control – like how crowded it is, etc. At least inside the GC we have more control. And there is a sense of continuity with the way we used to live - so we feel comfortable here."

- Priya Naidu, Bangalore

People 'like us'

For Priya, who originally hails from Andhra Pradesh and moved to the US in 1998 after her marriage, and returned only in 2011, the building of a community in India which she and her husband could call their own, was a key concern:

"Though we were so well-travelled, Keshav and I had never had an Indian city that we could call our own. Keshav grew up in the US, and was always nostalgic about India, like me. Even though he was with an American multinational technology corporation, and I was working in Financial Risk Management at an international accounting firm, and we were so busy moving from the US to South America, then to Hong Kong and Singapore, we still found time to volunteer with an NGO called ASHA in India. ASHA worked on education projects for underprivileged children. We always wanted to return to India one day. When his company offered Karan a transfer to Bangalore, we jumped at it, especially because we had already invested in a flat in the city on one of our previous visits."

However, since Priya's parents live in the city of Varanasi, and Keshav's family continued to live in the US, the couple initially found it challenging to adjust to the social isolation and the lack of a network of friends or relatives in Bangalore:

"Bangalore was modern, vibrant - we really liked Bangalore. And you can't beat this weather! But living in a flat in a crowded city area, knowing just your immediate neighbours - that wouldn't have worked for us. We are not like the locals. We also knew that we had to build our network of friends from scratch - so we moved into a GC. Perfectly designed, and we could afford it. Now we have found people like us - people at our level, who have the same kind of sensibilities."

Priya, like Rashmi Thomas, and other returnees in this study, emphasises that they are different, they are 'not like the locals'. The phrase underlines the ever-increasing social

distance between the two groups - the residents of the city and the residents of what can be perceived as the walled city. While members of the GC like Priya do not actively reject social interaction with the locals, their own self-perception as a community unto itself, solidifies the separation from the world outside – keeping not just the poorer sections of society but also the other citizens in general, even passers-by, at bay. In this manner, the gated community cordons off both space and self.

The longing for the similar and the familiar, which motivates the returnees to choose the GC as a place to live in and look for ‘people like us’ is juxtaposed with the act of putting ‘difference’ at the heart of their experience. The casual use of the phrase ‘people like us’, that features in the narratives of most of the participants in this study, reflects the desire to mark themselves as ‘different’ from the local community. Simultaneously, it can be interpreted as an expression of their desire to hold on to a specific form of identity, to be part of a community with whom they can establish solidarity.

Shilpita Khanna, an artist by profession, argues that *“there is nothing wrong with wanting to be with people who are similar to us”*. Shilpita chose to be tied to her husband’s mobile professional trajectory as a trailing spouse, and travelled with him and her children across four countries in ten years, before convincing her husband to return to India in 2006:

“See, even when you are in Chicago or Denver, you go looking for an area with Indians, any Indians, because you just want people with the same background. But here I am already in India, so now I want people who are like me in terms of experiences and background. There you are also comfortable with a desi crowd - could be Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankans.... doesn’t matter, they are just desi. It’s all about a similar culture - desi culture. But once you are back on Indian soil, you are looking for a similar kind of mindset and exposure - both intellectual and professional background”.*

{*‘Desi’ has evolved from the word ‘desh’ which means homeland in the Hindi language}

‘Desi’ is a popular term in the US and Canada, used to refer to members of the South Asian diaspora (Maira, 2002) and is a badge of identity amongst South Asian American society. As such, ‘desiness’ is a familiar usage, associated with journeys and settlement (Alexander, 2010).

However, Helen Kim in her work on ‘desiness’ in the UK argues that while ‘desiness is the lived form of diaspora’ (2012, p.560), it is not a static notion and cannot be equated to homogeneity.

In different settings, 'desiness' might have different interpretations. She holds up the UK as an example where the term 'desi' is more commonly linked with South Asian cultural forms and musical genres rather than just the homeland.

Shilpita seems to be using the term 'desi' to imply a sameness, a sense of belonging to a common culture, and while in the US, she bundles various South Asian countries under the 'desi' umbrella. In doing so, she is, perhaps, essentializing the idea of 'desi' culture or a 'desi' diaspora - she does not seem to crave any more exactitude than a shared form of belonging. Yet once she is back in India, the notion of 'desi' appears to have lost some of its significance for her. She realises that rather than living along with the local residents, she would prefer to live with returning migrants like herself, with similar social and economic capital. Thus, for returnees like Shilpita, solidarity, and a sense of belonging to a community become important goals, and it is the gated community that she turns to for the fulfilment of those goals.

The term 'solidarity' is most often interpreted in terms of nationalism or ethno-cultural attributes such as language, religion, and local customs (Oosterlynck, 2019). It is also linked to, among other forms, to sustainable community movement organisations or other social movements (Forno and Graziano, 2014). However, in the case of returnees living inside a gated complex, place-based forms of solidarity based on inter-dependencies can occur. Solidarity springs up because they share practical, everyday resources; it is a form of solidarity that develops '*in the different spatio-temporal register of everyday place-based practices*' (Oosterlynck et al, 2015, p.765). This extends beyond the kind of reciprocity based on moral commitments that are grounded in common beliefs and values, or collective histories (Etzioni, 1998). Solidarity in this context can also be understood as a bonding based on a shared 'groupness' which signifies group membership. The term 'group' is both elusive and abstract, while still existing as a social construction (Jenkins, 2002, p.9). Both Rashmi and Priya are alluding to a group when they talk about living with 'like-minded people' and maintaining a particular kind of shared lifestyle. Their behaviour is a display of groupness, and it offers foci of identification for the members and demands loyalty in return.

Rashmi Thomas, who returned with her family on Christmas Eve in 2006, first stayed in a serviced apartment in the heart of the city near Ulsoor Lake. Rashmi confesses that the initial period of acclimatisation to India was a struggle:

"It came as a bit of a shock. Ulsoor is a nice peaceful area, and it was also close to where my parents lived. But it was almost rural in its infrastructure - a mud road led to the bus-stop where the school bus would come to pick up my children. Even the apartment had problems - in the very first week, we found a mouse! After a month, we moved to a villa in a gated community called Meadow View Estate. That was a nice move, because our furniture, shipment, and all our boxes were still arriving from the US, and now we could accommodate all of it. Later, we moved to an even bigger villa at Belle Green Paradise."

Unlike Rashmi Thomas, returning migrants like Priya Naidu, and others like Shilpita Khanna, Gayatri Ramaswamy, Saroja Erraguntla, and Veena Advani, hadn't lived in Bangalore prior to returning to India. They thus occupy a hybrid space between returning migrants and residents. The process of resettlement for these returnees has involved the shifting and re-assembling of spatial, cultural, and social boundaries.

While communities and neighbourhoods cannot automatically be assumed to be idyllic, harmoniously functioning units of human interaction, the neighbourhood within the gated complex can become an intimate space that is experienced as 'home' by the residents. Here, 'neighbourhood' is interpreted as 'a limited territory within a larger urban area where people inhabit dwellings and interact socially' (Hallman, 1984, p.13). A setting such as the gated complex in this study can produce a certain kind of 'habitus', or the 'system of dispositions that guides people's choices and dispositions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.133). The idea of the habitus has drawn criticism from some quarters as being 'overly deterministic' (Chaney, 1996; Raffo & Reeves, 2000). Acknowledging that this is a possibility, this research refrains from making predetermined notions of what the neighbourhood of a gated community will be like.

The nature of a neighbourhood, the attributes it will possess, is shaped by who has occupied the space and who will occupy it. In a fundamental sense, 'the consumers of neighbourhood can be considered the producers of neighbourhood as well' (Galster, 2001, p, 2116). This is reflected in the data in this study - it can be observed that the members of gated communities actively create and shape the neighbourhood of their habitus. These residents, who have come together on the basis of being 'like each other', have had similar migratory journeys, though their individual experiences will have been different. They have lived and worked abroad for

many years before returning to India, and their children now attend the same kind of international schools. Back in the home society, they share similar work, lifestyle, and travel choices, and abide by the GC's rules and regulations that apply to all. They hold a similar social status, and practise similar ways of being, and thus get socialised into adopting shared lifestyles (Pinxten and Lievens, 2014). The convivial setting further scripts bonds of friendships (Adams & Allan, 1998) that spring up easily between the members of the GC. The influence of the habitus is mirrored in the solidarity on display, and the social and economic capital held by the inhabitants of the gated community. It is visible in the manner in which it structures and organises the societal context within which families 'do' family life, and 'enact' community life (Allan, 2008).

Structured Isolation - The New Civic Island

Since most of the residents work in international firms, and travel extensively for varying lengths of time, security is a key concern. Shilpita describes the web of external and internal security systems set up at all the gated complexes - the security guards, the CCTV cameras, the constant patrolling inside the grounds, and the instant connectivity with other residents through intercoms and walkie talkies:

"India is where I feel at home, it is where I was born. But my husband travels very often, and he was very worried about our safety. When we were in Nigeria on one posting, we had similar fears. Nigeria has a very high crime rate. Even there, we were living in a gated complex, and we were not allowed to step out of it on our own, or drive on our own. We always had a car and a driver, and a security guard with us. In Bangalore, we move around freely, but late evenings may be unsafe. Inside our GC, we know everyone and the security system is strong. Outside in the city you can't be sure - in India there is always a risk. Unless you are staying in a small town where your parents and grandparents have lived, and everybody knows everyone on the street. My own childhood in Faridabad was spent like that, in a close-knit community. The houses were ordinary but there was a strong community feeling - lots of gossip over the walls, be it about the neighbour's daughter's marriage, or somebody's problems with the boss, or school problems. A very down-to-earth place - people were very connected. It's not like that in a modern GC, but still, living inside a secure gated complex is very comforting."

- Shilpita Khanna

Inside the complex, a sense of place is created through the process of sharing a security system, a swimming pool, and an auditorium where community events are staged, such as festive celebrations, classical music and dance concerts. Pre-empting the possible inconveniences caused by sole reliance on the city's government-managed municipal systems, most gated complexes in Bangalore have made arrangements for their own reserves of potable water supply. This form of self-reliant action is echoed in gated enclaves in other parts of the world (Webster and Lai, 2003). Alternate sources of power supply, independent systems of sewage disposal, and in some cases, water purification systems are an inherent part of the gated complex model in Bangalore.

A newspaper report provided details of a popular gated complex in Bangalore that had 2,850 luxury apartments vertically mounted in 23 towers, the whole area spanning 60 acres (Chandran, 2017). The complex has since expanded, and has 162 security guards patrolling the grounds, parking space for a few thousand cars, and on an average uses up 1.2 million litres of water a day. This, for an estimated 10,000 residents, works out to 120 litres per person per day, in direct contrast to the other residents of the city who are allocated 65 litres per person per day, by the government's Water Supply Department (Chandran, 2017).

This flaunting of privilege has drawn heavy criticism from the local press and community who object to GC residents availing of special facilities in a city beset with water shortage problems (Sood, 2013; The New York Times, 2012; Outlook, 2008). Urban researchers have pointed out that increasingly, the 'transient "new rich" live in gated communities and tend to rely on the market for their services rather than make direct claims on the state' (Kamath and Vijayabaskar, 2014, p.151). Much like other gated communities in other parts of the world (Faiola, 2002; Greenstein et al, 2000), these GC inmates are perceived to be resisting engagement with civic problems beyond their own boundaries. The larger the gated enclave, the more efficient it becomes in meeting almost all the residents' needs, and the more likely that its residents 'secede from public life' (Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004, p.926).

Degrees of Separation

Occupying a central position in the everyday lives of the residents is the deluxe Clubhouse. In many parts of the world, for most expatriates, the 'Club' is central to everyday life, fulfilling social and emotional needs and becoming an 'oasis of home' (Sinha, 2001), a meeting place for people with similar backgrounds, and particularly a setting that offers a ready-made European

lifestyle. Other expatriate narratives situated in receiving societies such as Singapore, often refer to the perennial demand for membership to private, exclusive clubs such as the American Association of Singapore, the Raffles Town Club, the British Club - deemed necessary for elite networking and social status. Bangalore boasts its own private luxury clubs for the NRI and expat groups, such as The Bangalore Expatriate Club, the Overseas Women's Club of Bangalore, and the Embassy Boulevard Club. The last-named club, spread over one lakh square feet, and claiming to have over '400 select members from 45 different countries' enthusiastically advertises events such as St Patrick's Day, Swedish May Day and Halloween, apart from Diwali and Christmas.

However, most participants in this study have preferred to patronise their own Clubhouse situated within their own exclusive gated complex. One resident, Priya Naidu, explains:

"We don't need to go to clubs outside the GC, because we already have our own exclusive club right here. And honestly, those clubs outside the GC won't really be international, they will admit anyone who has the money for the high membership fee. While inside the GC, only residents can become members. The ambience is designed to suit our tastes – even the menu offers all kinds of options – Indian, as well as more Mediterranean dishes. Most weekends we do breakfast here, or dinner. Our kids drop in on their own and we know they are safe. There is nobody from outside. We even have coffee meetings here. It's just our own private space".

There is a sense of ownership and entitlement. Once a 'fulcrum of colonial identity', the club has traditionally been exclusionary, denying entry to 'all foreigners, women and people of unsuitable social background' (Morris 1998, pg.81). In a similar fashion, within a gated community (which can also be perceived as an elective cultural group), notions of 'us' and 'them' are present and relate to the basic concept of belonging to a club. 'Clubbability' (Sinha, 2001) is also about constructing a cliquish identity in relation to others, one that marks a degree of stratification from the others. Applying a Bourdieusian lens, it becomes clear that the network-based resources associated with social capital have proven extremely beneficial to the gated community. Bourdieu defines social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (1986, p.247). The gated community becomes the orb within which people with a similar quantum and configuration of forms of capital, cleave together. This facilitates the formation of a distinct social class (Pinxten and Lievens, 2014).

Atkinson and Flint define gated communities as ‘walled and gated residential developments that restrict public access’ (2004, p.875). The very nature of such a practice of segregation aimed at creating and preserving exclusivity, is exclusionary. Gated enclaves, insidiously, privatise the public space, denying the local populace the right to access what are essentially community resources (Gonzalez, 2000; Webster, 2002). Privatisation policies that restrict people from outside the gated community from accessing sidewalks and streets, which would normally be considered areas of public domain in an urban setting (Blakely, 2007; Blakely and Snyder, 1997), create degrees of separation that solidify over time. In her work on urban fear, wherein anxieties over violence and crime drives the upper middle class in America to choose secure gated enclaves, Setha Low suggests that adding walls, gates, and guards produces a landscape that merely ‘encodes class relations and residential (race/class/ethnic/gender) segregation more permanently in the built environment’ (2001, p.45).

Living in a Bubble

Priya says that she is unsure of her family’s future plans regarding settlement in India, particularly once the children grow up. She emphasises that they had decided to return primarily to “*show the kids the good aspects of India*”. However, even as she expresses her desire to acquaint them with the possibilities of India, she acknowledges her fear of exposing her children to the ‘dangerous’ sights of India:

“India has a lot to process. The main city streets are a bit dangerous. There is too much poverty, piles of garbage on the roads - we try not to expose the kids to that side of India. No, I don’t think it’s being over-protective. We don’t want to further confirm the tainted mental picture of India that they have developed after living in the West. A lot of people think of India as ‘poor India’. As if that is the only reality – poor, sick people who can be helped by people from the West! Our children have never lived in India prior to our return. But because they are from a privileged group who can choose to experience what they want to, we wanted to ensure that they get a balanced picture - they can see both the skyscrapers and the slums. They also experience Indian customs and festivals right here within the GC, they can see how warm people are. They can see that development is taking place in India, but very slowly.”

There is a giving in, and a holding back, which points to the liminal space she occupies mentally regarding resettlement. She uses the word ‘here’ to refer to a luxuriant gated complex that is in stark contrast to the distressing conditions of the urban poor in Bangalore, yet Priya does not see structural inequalities as a cause for disquiet. She asserts that her family is aware of

their privileged position, but insists that living in a gated community is the only pragmatic route to resettlement in India:

"I am aware that we are living in a bubble, but if we were not staying in a GC it would have been too much of a culture shock for my family. Our house here is air-conditioned, we have 4 bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, and a garden. We have 3 helpers and a driver, and yes, the international school that my kids attend is a bubble, even the bus that takes them to school is air-conditioned, unlike normal school buses in India! So, I admit we are pretty much inside a bubble. But to balance that out, we take the kids on treks and tough vacations, where they have to learn to rough it out. Also, I volunteer in schools – in Bellandur in an Urdu school, now in a government school close to this GC. But I can't deny that living in a GC just makes everything easier."

Veena Advani, who returned to India with her family in 2009, after spending 17 years in the US agrees wholeheartedly, and emphasises that the gated community eases resettlement for return migrants into India:

"A GC gives you a soft landing in a country that comes as a bit of a shock at first. My first impressions of Bangalore were a let-down. We realised that if we were to opt for an apartment in the city - we would be completely at the mercy of the state infrastructure and amenities. We'd be bang in the centre of the pollution and the crowds. I don't think people like us can do that now, live like that, not after we have lived in the US. And why should we? So, we bought this villa in a beautiful, gated complex in Whitefield. We didn't even have to learn the local language, because inside the GC everybody speaks in English, and the school they go to is an international one. We have helpers who speak Hindi or English."

Veena had grown up in the city of Bombay and had never lived in Bangalore before, but now cannot imagine setting up home in Bombay where gated complexes are a rarity given the overcrowding of living spaces and the dense grid of apartment blocks, luxury high-rises and shanties packed tightly together: *"It's about space. And the life we lead here. Honestly, if we were not living in a GC, we might have gone back to the US by now."*

Premised on the 'expectation of privacy' through physical barriers, private streets, and deed restrictions (Phillips, 2007), the gated complex can also be referred to as a return 'enclave' where the inhabitants interact chiefly with one another (Stefansson, 2004).

Shilpita, who also lives in the Belle Green Paradise gated complex, asks rhetorically:

"Why should we feel guilty about it? My husband feels guilty sometimes, but I don't. If we are enjoying life, it's alright. I married Dheeraj in 1996 and moved

to the US with him. Later, we moved as a family from the US to Nigeria, to Southampton in the UK, and then on to Singapore...finally returning to India which is where I felt I truly belonged. We've earned this privilege, we've worked for it, he is still working hard for it."

Shilpita points out that she has taken her children to many parts of India, and they have adapted well:

"I have taken them to my relatives' place where there is no internet for long periods. When we visit our relatives in north India, my kids have noticed the difference in the way they live - not everyone can have a private garden. They've seen poor kids in Bangalore, they've noticed the poor housing. One day, they saw some low-budget serial on television which was set in a house with electrical wires hanging outside, drain overflowing etc. And they said, oh this is like the house we passed on the road that day! They know that we have worked hard to reach where we are now. My brother (who lives in New Jersey) and I keep arguing about this. He will say - 'you are not living in the real India; you are living in a bubble'. And I argue - Yes, of course we are living in a bubble - but we are always going out of it too. I go very often to Commercial Street a couple of times a month for shopping, just to enjoy being with other people. It's jam-packed with vendors, shoppers, and eateries, and I love the crowds, and the noise. But we can't live there..."

Thus, the gated complex becomes both home and fortress for the inmates. It offers security, amenities, and status, and becomes a 'prestige community', symbolising exclusionary aspirations and the strong urge to differentiate (Blakely, 2007). Within this context, the gated community also becomes the stage upon which social actors belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds interact.

Mobility Convergence and Unequal Interdependence

For an institution like a gated community to work efficiently and autonomously, a considerably large labour force is called for. Over the last ten years this requirement has been met by workers who have migrated from remote areas in Karnataka or neighbouring states to the city of Bangalore, in search of jobs and a better life for their families. Others are sourced from the squatter settlements lying in close proximity to the gated complexes. In the process, gated communities become 'sites of mobility convergence' (Bal et al, 2017, p.15), where local, regional, national, and transnational migration converge in a mutually constitutive mosaic of mobility. As Ellen Bal describes it in her paper on unequal mobility flows in urban India, the gated community is the site where 'old' and 'new' (global) India meet each other (2017, p.17)

and the lives of wealth transnational returnees become intertwined with those of precarious workers. In a very short period, these service providers, which include chauffeurs, nannies, maids/domestic workers, cooks, plumbers and guards, become indispensable to the smooth running of the complex (Chase, 2008).

However, the domestic workers and their affluent employers co-exist in a system of inherently unequal interdependence (Ray and Qayum, 2009). Domestic workers work in both full-time and part-time capacities during the day, but they do so without any union support that could have provided a degree of security against exploitation or discrimination (Bal, 2017). While these employees seem to prefer working for employers in gated communities for reasons that range from higher wages than what is the norm in residences outside the gated complex, to the perceived 'dignity' of the job (Natrajan and Joseph, 2018, p.10), the sheer competition for these lucrative jobs exerts enormous pressure on the employees to perform or be replaced. A common sight every morning and evening is the long queue of domestic workers being signed in and out by the security personnel at the gates, which can be likened to 'factory gates' where the workers 'punch in their entry and exit' (Natrajan and Joseph, 2018, p.11).

The battery-operated golf carts that the security chief drives around in, whirr past the dozens of domestic helpers, cleaners, and cooks on foot, who have first been checked and cleared by the security guards at the entrance gate - the process includes a declaration by the workers about how much money they carry in their purse before they enter, and having it checked again when they leave. Other rules and regulations include not loitering on the paved streets, not sitting on garden benches, and not using the manicured green spaces surrounding the Club. In a few of the most plush gated apartment complexes, they cannot use the elevator (Chandran, 2017). Thus, gated communities can become a tightly locked social space that excludes the 'other'. The advantages of this form of 'entangled urbanism' (Srivastava, 2015) are evident. Besides domestic duties, these domestic workers fulfil another key role as carriers of 'Indianness' for the children of the returnees (Bal, 2017), using the local dialect as well as the Hindi language to communicate with them, providing anecdotal glimpses of their own lives outside the gated complex, and sometimes explaining the local customs. After the day's work is done, they either return to their own shanties and tenements in the evening or stay in the tiny 'servant accommodation' that has been incorporated into the architectural design of the villa by the builder. These service providers are crucial to the returnee's well-being in attaining and nurturing a quality of life they could not

easily obtain in their daily lives while overseas. Undoubtedly, the 'culture of domestic servitude' in 'old India' (Qayum and Ray, 2003, p.527) is a welcome aspect of return migration to India. Yet, as Nayyar describes it, the two Indias exist and flourish side by side - the new global India and a local one, which he calls 'Bharat' (2012: xii).

India's growing presence in the neo-liberal global market economy and its small upwardly mobile middle class does not reflect the fortunes of much of the population in India, more than a quarter of which lives below the poverty line. Rather, it serves to accentuate the fact that it is largely the Indian elites who have access to a high quality of education both in India and overseas because they have the socio-economic capital required to access it (Tejada and Bhattacharya, 2014; Drèze and Sen, 2013). The highly skilled returning migrants belong to the very same elite class whose lifestyle choices and personal wealth position them as a group separate from the rest of Indian society.

However, the returnees in this study resent the implication that they are indifferent to the glaring disparities in their own socio-economic position and that of their employees. They point out that their treatment of their helpers is a far cry from the customary form of treatment that they themselves had witnessed in their growing up years in India. Shilpita pushes back against the notion that gated community residents are insensitive to the realities of the domestic worker's everyday struggle.

"Yes, I am glad to have these employees, but I call them helpers not servants... which is very different from the way they are addressed locally, or even by my relatives in Delhi. We pay well because we want them to earn enough to sustain their families. If you look at how stingy these local Kannadigas are - they pay their servants so little. Maybe just 3000 rupees or less a month and then the poor woman has to work in 4 houses to make enough money. Here I have one person dedicated to my house. And I pay a salary that is equivalent to what she would make by working in 5 houses... any time they fall sick, we take them to the doctor, and pay their bills. It is a form of charity that we are doing. A lot of people in the GC do that - it comes naturally to them. Everybody is associated with some project or the other - voluntary work. I volunteer to teach kids at government schools art and craft. We have brought the culture of voluntary work from abroad to India".

Shilpita acknowledges the inequalities in her relationship with her helpers but views it as a way of life in India. She takes satisfaction from her own actions in doing what is best for herself and

well as for her domestic workers. Despite the somewhat inaccurate claim of having “*brought the culture of voluntary work from abroad to India*”, what is significant is the proprietorial tone she adopts when she describes the gated community’s generosity with its time and money. The ‘we’ in her last sentence refers to her friends and fellow residents and can be interpreted as a desire to be ‘emotionally embedded’ (Aranda, 2007, p.208). A sense of being enfolded within and anchored in a community that the residents feel is essentially their own, despite having other family members staying at accessible locations, either in Bangalore itself, or in neighbouring cities.

Thus, the participants in this study are seen to draw liberally on the solidarity and similarity they experience with fellow members in the GC for emotional sustenance. In this way, gated communities cease to be just ‘spatially defined residential communities with shared amenities...with the potential for developing social networks’ (Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004, p.914) and acquire the semblance of ‘home’.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the ways in which the longing for similarity and continuity impels returning migrants to look for ‘home’ amidst a community of people ‘like’ themselves. This desire, coupled with the imaginary of a ‘new globalising India’ (Ilkjær, 2015) has motivated many highly skilled returnees to India to choose exclusive gated communities in Bangalore as a place to put down roots once again.

Researchers have created varying typologies of gated communities (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Burke, 2001; Le Goix, 2004; Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004). Three descriptors emerge as recurring motifs in their research - ‘security’, ‘status’ and ‘lifestyle’ (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Baycan-Levent and Gülümser, 2007). The gated communities in Bangalore incorporate all the above motifs and symbolise the prism of class privilege that the returnees’ notions of belonging are refracted through. These complexes are distinct habitats, independent of the large, crowded city that they are situated within, and are inhabited by a group of elites who have classed expectations, and access to privileged settings. These include clubs, music soirees, business class lounges when they travel, expensive vacations in India and abroad, and international schools for their children, among other amenities.

Returning migrants attempt to give their remembered cultural spaces material form, such that the new spaces they inhabit become a hybridised sphere of their past experiences and present aspirations. They thus employ patterns of living and 'ways of being' (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton, 1994) that straddle both the present and the past, both home and host societies. Gradually, the gated community and its members enter into a dialectical relationship wherein 'places are produced and given (potentially multiple) meanings and identities by people, places may also be said to shape people in some way' (Torkington, 2012, p.76).

Most highly skilled returnees the world over continue to be highly mobile and transnational (Searle, 2016). The greater their migration experience, the greater is the likelihood of upward occupational mobility (Kļave and Šūpule, 2019). Research on diasporic resettlement has pointed to how 'household geographies are intimately bound up with national and transnational geographies' (Blunt and Varley, 2004, p.3). The narratives in this study reflect the dominance of that transnational geography that can well influence the returnee's adaptation to the home society.

Even after returning to the homeland, the returnees in this study have continued to forge multiple links across borders resulting in 'flexible subjectivities' (Corcoran, 2002). The choice of affluent residential areas (Varrel, 2012, 2016; Searle, 2016) further accentuates the transnational tenor of their lives. Their attempts to retain the global aspects of their acquired identity while continuing to perform culturally appropriate roles in the home society and introduce their children to the 'good aspects of India' only mirrors their tangled notions of belonging in transnational living. This is further demonstrated by their desire to recreate the familiar physical framework of 'home', albeit inside a gated complex.

For many urban analysts, the gated complex is a flawed developmental model (Rai, 2012), which works against sustainable development zones designed for collaborative, equitable living. Yet, it is the exclusivity, and near-autonomy in functioning of the gated complex that is proving to be the biggest draw for its elite residents. Characterised by within-group similarity and between-group dissimilarity, the gated communities in this study actively nurture spatial and affective distance between the groups inside and outside the gates of the complex, even though in reality, both groups may live in geographical proximity to each other. While gated communities function as sites of mobility convergence where the local, regional, national,

and transnational forms of migration merge, the interwoven social fields of the employer and the employed exhibit systems of discrimination and socio-economic inequalities (Bal et al, 2017). The ethos of the GC thus incorporates notions of exclusion and segregation on the one hand, and social integration on the other (Atkinson and Blandy, 2013; Caldeira, 1996; Coy and Pöhler, 2002).

The shutting of the gates at a gated complex therefore takes on a metaphorical significance – within the gates lies exclusivity, luxury, and security. Outside, lie the less attractive realities of the other India, with its unequal regimes of poverty and privation. Inside the bubble of the gated complex, the inhabitants can limit their interaction with the locals to the workplace, and in a more intimate way, to the many male and female workers who work at the upkeep of their homes, and the community's grounds, structures, and gardens. The de-linking from everyday reality in India occurs at two levels – the luxurious residential spaces within the gated complex and the glass and chrome multinational and IT offices that represent their workplace. The result is 'a 'split' city in which one segment of the population dwells in the space of the national/global while the majority remain rooted in place, or locality' (Upadhy, 2009, p.263).

Yet, the returnees in this study adopt a pragmatic stance when confronted with the inequalities of the system they live within, and help, though inadvertently, to perpetuate. Almost all the participants in this study assert that living in a gated community has helped the process of resettlement into a country they are rediscovering. Even as they distance themselves from the chaos outside their gates, the sharing of inner subjectivities of belonging and schism creates a form of solidarity within the gated community, resulting in a closer bond between the members. The GC therefore becomes a source of emotional sustenance.

Back in 1995, Dennis R. Judd used a rather creative turn of phrase while describing the new gated communities emerging in the upscale neighbourhoods of the West - 'The new gated communities are remarkably like the walled cities of the mediaeval world, constructed to keep the hordes at bay' (pg.160). If the walls in that context established a bulwark against the roving bandits and the like, the walls of the modern gated enclaves, especially in an Indian city, are tasked with creating separation and isolation from the world outside.

The 'visual separation' provided by gates and walls (Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004) also becomes symbolic of the reluctance on the part of the returnee to completely surrender to ground realities beyond the gates of the GC. There is a holding back, an oft-expressed desire to see the current situation as a temporary one. Living in gated communities, they seem to approach the project of resettlement into India with diffidence, occupying liminal spaces that hold them back from committing to a finality of return to the homeland. In the phrases uttered by the returnees such as "*...in India there is always a risk*", and '*if we were not staying in a GC, it would have been too much of a culture shock for my family*', can be found the traces of ambivalence towards their return migration experience.

In the dual referencing that peppers their descriptions and self-perceptions, they therefore occupy spaces of what I term as 'liminal return', hovering between immersion and withdrawal that can well impact future migration decisions. The prospect of circular migration thus hovers continually over the vast tracts of luxury gated enclaves. The gates remain open and shut at the same time.

Chapter 6

Trailing Spouses: Tales of Agency and Resilience

Linked Lives

“No, no. I never blindly followed my husband. If I had said no, we would not have moved. He always trusted my decision...he would say ‘there is this option to move’ and he would check with me. It was always me who got excited and said let’s move. For me the only criterion was - is this going to be good for him professionally? I always put his career above mine. I was on a dependent visa all through the ten years we moved from country to country, so I could not get a full-time job. I went with him wherever he went, so I could not have goals just for me... but that I just accepted. I did whatever I could, wherever I was. He always said - ‘You don’t worry about the money part - I am taking care of that’. So, I painted, took art classes, like when we were posted in Singapore - I kept doing things. Even after returning to Bangalore, I taught art history, conducted art walks for the National Gallery of Modern Art. Everywhere I went, I had to make new friends, but then, if I had stayed in the same place, I would have had the same group of friends! Moving every time made me start from scratch. So, I made a new ecosystem around me every time I moved.”

- Shilpita Khanna, Whitefield, Bangalore.

In 1996, Shilpita was an art student at a well-known art school called the Lalit Kala Akademi in Delhi, when her parents arranged her marriage to Dheeraj, a well-placed engineer working in the oil and gas industry in the United States. Giving in to her parents’ wishes, and unsure about her own career opportunities in India as an artist, she married Dheeraj, and they moved to California. One of the first questions she asked her husband was about how long he planned to stay in America, and when they would be returning to India. His answer was ambiguous, but she remembers that he stressed how important it was to invest in a global footprint before returning to India, if at all. This could mean accepting contract-based work that would last a few years, then they would move on to a more lucrative offer.

The last two decades have seen scholars questioning the notion of the ‘standard employment relationship’ characterised by the permanent, full-time contract which is taken to be ‘a universal model’ (Supiot, 1998). Scholars like Breman and Van Der Linden have pointed to the changing nature of the standard employment relationship and emphasised that it can no longer be

considered the globally accepted norm of capitalism; rather, precarious work is the ‘real norm of capitalism’ (2014, p.920). Thus, terms like ‘precarity’ and ‘stability’ are being reassessed, ‘questioning the former’s exceptionality and the latter’s universality’ (Betti, 2016, p.2). Flexible, project-based, or contract-bound work can no longer be seen as the exception, but as the ‘real norm of the global employment relationship’. It can be seen that migrant professionals, such as the participants in this study, have viewed this form of employment as a welcome opportunity to carve out their career projects. Applying a human capital theory lens, migration for a highly skilled individual today can be understood in the light of a career investment associated with decided returns such as earnings growth and upward mobility (Branden, 2013). Shilpita describes it as “a life pattern that we migrants have to adopt”:

“My husband explained it to me at the very beginning of our married life - once we migrated, this is what we would have to do. He would have to build his career by working with big companies, keep getting promotions, and be ready to keep moving - that is how he would get the best assignments. Even when we were about to return to India, he got this offer from McKinsey in Singapore, and he wanted to take that up too - he said it would mean a lot for his career to have the McKinsey name added to his bio, and it would help in getting a senior position in India when we returned. And that is exactly what happened...”

Thus, a migration experience can be interpreted as a positive qualification on the curriculum vitae, adding a layer of distinction to one’s professional identity. Migrant professionals can be included in the category of the highly mobile, whose ‘openness to new experiences’ (Hannerz, 1996, p.106) establishes them as individuals who know ‘how to move on, how to adjust and adapt to a world of cultural contingency’ (Turner, 2000, p.142). However, there are complexities involved in the migration processes of transmigrants, especially when they move as a family. In a majority of the cases, spouses and children also move with the primary worker (Bhatt, 2018). This chapter unpacks the trailing spouse’s experience of precarity, and instability of professional identity during the process of global relocation. ‘Trailing spouse’ is a term used to describe the spouse or individual following in the tracks of or accompanying their partner who is an internationally mobile professional (Cangi`a, 2017; Callan and Ardener, 1984; Walsh 2007). Such is the dominance of the concept of the ‘trailing spouse’ in expatriate discourses, that it is sometimes adopted in official paperwork, as for instance in Indonesia, where the visa issued to the trailing spouse carries the official term ‘ikut swami’, which means ‘following the husband’ and does not permit her to hold paid work positions (Fechter, 2016, p.9).

Across global settings, trailing spouses must reinvent their professional selves, or quit their jobs, and additionally, undertake most of the family duties. They must weigh their professional lives in balance with their personal family lives (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005), and reach a compromise. This in turn creates a tenuous interiority for the trailing spouse, and a 'fragile, threatened privilege' (Bourdieu 1999, p.82). Whether the flexibility to move is a choice of the working spouse, or imposed upon the individual as part of the job, the act of moving creates an 'ambivalent condition of precarity' for the trailing spouse (Cangia, 2018, p.10).

Not just 'passive reactors to males' migration decisions'

While this may often be the reality, there is a specious imputation in expatriate women's discourses that the trailing spouse is a victim of sorts (Fechter, 2007), who experiences hardships while putting her own personal ambitions aside in the interests of her family's advancement. The existing literature on trailing spouses foregrounds the case of the wife prioritising the career trajectory of her global professional spouse above her own, highlighting only the boundaries that typically circumscribe her professional prospects.

In this chapter, I argue that such a narrative offers a limited view of her lived reality, and her capacity to regain a degree of control over her condition. As Phipps (2022) notes, the words and narratives we use to conceptualise migration can narrow our understanding of lived experience. 'We need to reflect on our use of language and engage with the ways in which language can (and all too frequently, does) reinforce and perpetuate certain ways of conceptualising migration and the lives, experiences and aspirations of those who move' (Phipps, 2022, p. 26). Building on Phipps' call to critically engage with the language used to conceptualise migration, I interrogate the term 'trailing spouse', which suggests an inherent passivity and lack of agency that may, in fact, be far from the case. While the term is a recurring one in migration literature, what has remained largely invisible is her agency in meaning-making in the personal, familial or societal spaces. As the theme of the trailing spouse gains prominence, especially in contemporary discourses about migrant professionals, it becomes necessary to avoid a reified portrayal of this identity category.

I seek to anchor this critique in the narratives of my participants who are technically 'trailing spouses' but whose actions do not conform to such assumptions. The female spouses who have

migrated, and now returned with their husbands to the home country, are not just 'passive reactors to males' migration decisions' (Cerrutti and Massey, 2001, p.187), but subjects exercising a degree of agency. While their accounts reflect a mix of reluctant acceptance, even resignation; they also evince resilience and adaptability. I employ this conceptual framework to trace the ways in which a trailing spouse exercises her choices, to demonstrate how her emotional work validates her identity as a caring subject, her cultural work substantiates her influential role within the family unit as the upholder of cultural capital, and how her support is critical to the success of the relocation. Accordingly, I foreground the voices of some of the women returnees in this study, who symbolise privileged transnational migration, to offer a gendered perspective on the checks and the freedoms experienced by trailing spouses during their mobile trajectories, and after returning to their home society. This study thus contributes to two fields of migration research: return migration, and transnational gender studies.

In recent years, socio-economic changes and evolving social attitudes in migrant-sending countries have propelled the feminization of migration, which is now viewed as an expanding area of research and policy development (Hoffman and Buckley, 2013). More than half of the labour migration flow from many Asian countries constitutes women (Cheng, 1999; Engle, 2004; Ryan, 2002), a trend which is echoed in other countries such as Latin America (Cerrutti, 2009; Donato, 1993). The World Migration Report estimates that out of the 281 million international migrants globally in 2020, approximately 135 million were female migrants (up from 130 million in 2019) (IOM, 2022). Over the years, the research focus has expanded to include not just wives migrating with their children to join their male spouses (Bohning, 1984; Castles, Miller and Ammendola, 2005), but also the emerging role of women as independent labour migrants (Kofman, 1999; Pedraza, 1991). With the increasing presence of women in the labour force, the feminization of migration literature began to underscore the different ways in which the local context shapes gendered migration opportunities (Foner, 2009), reflecting the 'profound transformations in the structure of families and gender roles in the international division of labour' (Beneria, Deere, and Kabeer, 2012:2).

The narratives in this study indicate that incorporating the micro-narratives of the female trailing spouse within the literature of the 'feminization of migration' would contribute significantly to a better understanding of gendered informal practices, illustrating how the reinforcement of gender role ideology may be skilfully countered or negotiated by the trailing spouse.

Cultural Norms and Tied Movers

Cultural norms and familial expectations can play a part in influencing life strategies (Jarvis, 1999; Komter, 1985). The very formation of aspirations for mobility is influenced by prevailing family structures and values (Botterill, 2014, p.234). Shilpita's parents had been seeking an NRI (Non-Resident Indian) spouse for their daughter even before she graduated from her college, and many a family discussion centred around the parents' aspirations for a suitable arranged marriage. An 'arranged marriage' involves the parents choosing a spouse for their offspring; their choices will be based on considerations of caste, religion, and status. While much has changed in India, 'arranged marriage' retains its dominance in society (Allendorf and Pandian, 2016; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2007). This is intended to ensure the continuity of tradition and social stability (Khandelwal, 2002, pp.151). Moreover, many sections of Indian society continue to believe that parents would be better positioned to choose a marriage partner for their offspring, as they have more life experience (Segal, 1998; Ranganath and Ranganath, 1997). Thus, an arranged marriage is viewed as one of the chief responsibilities of parenthood in India and is commonly understood as a permanent contract between families rather than individuals (Gopalkrishnan and Babacan, 2007; Mooney, 2006; Das and Kemp, 1997). It is also 'a key vehicle through which a family's status is expressed or improved' (Bhopal, 2011, p.433). Thus, the institution of the 'arranged marriage' perpetuates the patrilineal and patrilocal family system in India, as also the caste system (Karve, 1965; Kolenda, 1987).

Patrilocality is a central pillar in the Indian family system, and it serves to reinforce the centrality of male decision-making (Kou and Bailey, 2017). It was an intrinsic part of the cultural ethos that Shilpita was exposed to, prior to marriage. Mechanisms such as patrilocal residence and patrilineal succession (Seymour, 1995) are embedded in the concept of patrilocality - the wife is expected to live with the extended family of her husband, and it is the male lineage that determines matters of succession.

There is no doubt, a marked degree of change in the way marital practices are conducted in India since the late 20th century, as for instance, the liberty given to educated young women to have a say in selecting their spouses (Bhopal, 2011). Yet, within families and households, individuals' lives remain interdependent (Elder et al., 2003). Households like Shilpita's can therefore be conceptualised as networks of 'linked lives' (Bailey et al. 2004, p.1618), where the interlinking and interdependence of social relationships exercises influence in charting

the life course of an individual. Family members become key influencers on migration decisions (Kou et al, 2017). Shilpita allowed the cultural patriarchy that she grew up with, to guide the compass of her life course, and accepted the customary path of 'arranged marriages' in India.

Shilpita recalls that her choice of fine art as a profession caused anxiety in her parents, who were keen on finding her a 'doctor or engineer husband':

*"They had such high expectations - marriage is such a big thing in our community. They would say jokingly that there was no way they would let me marry some *jhola-wala artist! In fact, they were so happy that a Punjabi engineer from the US was even ready to meet their daughter, and even happier when the marriage took place. My father said to me - 'see their family, how respected they are, and from our own community'."*

{*jholawala artist - Here Shilpita makes a reference to the artist stereotype in India - the impoverished artist carrying a cheap cloth bag containing his painting brushes.}

It was expected that Shilpita would accompany her husband to the US after marriage. Migration was seen as advancing her spouse's professional success while benefiting the family materially. Early studies in the 80s and 90s suggested that enhanced income potential was a major incentive for family migration, though such an opportunity was only taken advantage of, when it involved the male spouse (Duncan & Perrucci, 1976; Lichter, 1980; Bielby & Bielby, 1992). Studies also show that women are still less likely to migrate for their own careers and are more likely to be 'tied movers' (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Bonney and Love, 1991; Cooke, 2001). This can be attributed to 'gendered intrahousehold differences in bargaining power' (Amcoff and Niedomysl, 2015, p. 874) or the influence of gender role ideology while taking migration decisions, as can be seen in the case of some of the participants in this study.

Gender role ideology propounds that a woman's family responsibilities must far outweigh her professional responsibilities, whereas the reverse would hold true for men (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). This form of gendered behaviour shapes many migration decisions and impels the female spouse to prioritise her husband's career over her own (Gupta, Banerjee & Gaur, 2012). Moreover, it influences the allocation of household work and childcare, because 'men's paid work is seen by both men and women as more fundamental to the family and to men's identity' (Branden, 2014, p.952). Shilpita's migration history therefore carried what Phipps (2013) evocatively calls the 'the weight of power, prestige, patriarchy and habit' (p.22).

For Shilpita, family migration meant putting her husband's career graph above her own fledgling career as an artist. As a 'trailing spouse' who accompanied her partner while he worked his way across global workspaces as an internationally mobile professional, or a 'professional transient' (Castells, 2011) and as a member of a 'transnational elite' (Friedman, 1986), Shilpita too got caught up in a cycle of mobility and had to embrace a 'paradigm of flows' (Fechter, 2007).

What's the point in being married otherwise?

Despite acquiring a postgraduate qualification in Art History from the University of Chicago in the US, and her prolific artistic output, Shilpita was unable to take up a full-time job.

Unhampered access to the labour market in the host country is inextricably linked to high-skilled migrant visa schemes (Kõu, 2016). Like many other dependent spouses in her position in the US, Shilpita found it difficult to transition from an H-4 family reunification visa to an H-1B visa status, leading to a crisis of ambiguity about her work status. While most professional migrants actively work at changing their immigration status to permanent residency and later citizenship, Shilpita's husband Dheeraj did not apply for permanent residency anywhere, as he moved back and forth in a frenetic work schedule across four countries over ten years.

Consequently, while Dheeraj pursued a choice biography pursuing gainful employment in senior management positions; Shilpita, as the trailing spouse, made the conscious choice to be tied to her husband's mobile trajectory and become a tied mover. It was by no means an easy decision to make - migrating as a family unit would undoubtedly have consequences for each member of the unit, rendering the process of decision-making a very complex one.

Shilpita found herself in a quandary because she felt that the only other option was to stay stationary in one country, while her husband moved from one international posting to another, in what can be referred to as a 'commuter marriage' (Gerstel and Gross, 1982, 1984). This is an arrangement where one spouse lives near his or her workplace for periods of time, away from the communal family home, because the commuting distance is too great to traverse on a daily basis. In recent times, the term includes a variant - 'commuter partnership', to accommodate unmarried couples living together (van der Klis & Mulder, 2008; Green et al., 1999). However, Shilpita found the idea of a 'commuter marriage' untenable:

"I never wanted the family to break up into separate units. I remember, when we got married and came to the US for the first time, I wanted to study for a

master's degree in Art History. Dheeraj also intended to do his MBA. He told me to wait, he would apply first, and that I should apply later to whichever college he was admitted to, so that we would not have to be in different places. And that's what we did - he got into an American university in Chicago, and he helped me to apply to the same university right after he got admission, for my master's program, and I got in! We managed to be together... what's the point in being married otherwise?"

All the same, despite the flexibility of approach, being on the move constantly takes its toll. The experience of precarity deepens with every move, sparked by apprehensions about future occupational opportunities, and the unpredictability of the nature of the next destination. This experience of the making and unmaking of occupational identity affects each migrating spouse and trailing spouse in a different manner, and to a different degree, depending on the support they can draw from their socio-emotional relations. However, this precarity in mobility can be offset by resilience, and the ability to imagine alternative realities for themselves (Cangia, 2018, p.9).

Early in the marriage, Shilpita came to terms with her position as the non-wage-earning spouse, and once she became a mother, she accepted the notion of being a 'trailing mother' (Cooke, 2001). She then focused her efforts on place-making and caregiving work. At the same time, she sought opportunities to engage in short-term activities that would keep her connected to her passion - art. It has been noted in other studies of trailing spouses that the wife usually holds a temporary job, rather than trying to build a full-fledged career (Moen and Yu, 2000). This can be interpreted as a gendered strategy to ensure flexibility of work hours so that her primary role as caregiver is not affected (Leung, 2017). Shilpita's husband suggested that she look for volunteer work:

"He always said to me, 'the US is a place for learning. Nobody is stopping you from volunteering - all they are doing is not paying you'. So, I would drive out on my own to look for museums where I could volunteer. I was working because I enjoyed it - that way I had the freedom to dash off to India when I needed to see my parents. I started seeing the advantages of my position. I was not able to follow up on my career as aggressively as I would have liked to, and there were moments when I asked myself - am I doing the right thing? But I always worked part time, did courses. I enjoyed travelling. I still keep in touch with my friends, in galleries, museums, in the UK, US and Singapore - sometimes I collaborate with somebody on a painting exhibition. Whenever I had to move with him, I would tell myself, don't worry, this is an opportunity to explore a new place."

All through her narration, Shilpita asserts that the choices were her own. Even as she says that she was able to appreciate the advantages of her position, she also emphasises that she did not just passively follow her husband, but actively influenced her husband's decisions about a new posting:

“Even when he was asked to choose between Moscow and Nigeria, I was the one who picked Nigeria! I remembered that Russia and India had a good relationship, people were going to Russia all the time to get a degree in medicine - the trend began in the late 90s. So, I told him that we could visit Moscow any time, but Nigeria - now we would never normally go to Nigeria, not even for a vacation! I remember so many people asked, ‘Why Nigeria?’ But I was excited about going to new places, seeing new cultures. If I can’t make my career, let’s see what best I can make of this experience - that was my approach. And truly, all those experiences have helped me look at life differently. It has shaped us, everywhere we lived - it shaped us”.

The Expat Bubble

Nevertheless, the excitement of discovering a new place comes with its own set of challenges and can often be followed by bouts of anxiety in what is a strange new cultural setting. It is a subjective emotional experience (Calhoun, 1989), which can often lead to the stay-at-home spouse experiencing a form of disorientation (Cangia, 2017). Shilpita's status was that of a member of an elite community of migrants, normatively referred to as 'expat'. Yet, it is evident that despite the global mobility that becomes almost a quotidian rhythm in an expat's life, and the 'freedom' of movement for those who have long been viewed as 'privileged' travellers (Beverstock, 2005; Smith and Favell, 2006; Meier, 2014; Cranston, 2016), there are restrictions that apply. Migrant professionals do not live in a 'frictionless world', they must also negotiate the local environment, deal with the nitty gritty of relocation, and establish routines (Willis, Yeoh and Fakhri, 2003, p.505).

Additionally, for most expat spouses, everyday activities are limited by the socio-cultural ecosystem of the place of relocation. While the setting of the gated complex in Nigeria, with its villas, swimming pool, tennis courts and the ubiquitous clubhouse, was undoubtedly luxurious, it was circumscribed by bands of concern about safety and security. This meant that for Shilpita, there was very little activity by way of venturing out into local spaces for work or leisure. Instead, like all the other expat spouses in Nigeria, her social world comprised the members of her gated community, and there was no extended interaction with the locals. She recalls the disorientation

she experienced - a sense of her world shrinking, as she stayed in a villa inside the GC for all the 8 months she was there. This was primarily because Shilpita was expecting her first child and she missed her parental home, but also because Nigeria was perceived as a crime-prone site. She refers to the relative isolation of their gated complex, as it was on the outskirts of the city. A great deal of pre-planning was involved in leaving the complex for even the most trivial activity:

“See, it was a very different kind of place, very high crime rate. Security issues were there. We had to inform the company that one’s husband worked in, and they would issue a day pass for you. Or you could take a monthly pass, and get a driver allotted to you. There were no shopping malls nearby, just a cluster of small houses at intervals occupied by the local tribes. We didn’t go anywhere alone – instead, we women would form groups and move out to visit a fabric bazaar or a store for household purchases.”

While her husband found his refuge in the workplace and enjoyed the conviviality of his colleagues and the interactions with his clients and company staff across the globe, besides the regular international travel he undertook as part of his work, Shilpita, like the other trailing wives in her position, found herself dwelling on the work stasis in her life. In her own words, *“I felt a little lost initially... I had a lot of time on my hands, and I didn’t know what to do with it.”* The everyday stretched in an endless arc, and she began feeling the need for meaningful social connections. Her way of dealing with it was to look for people like herself. This is not unusual. Most expat wives find themselves searching for people ‘like themselves’ rather than turning to the locals, if only to bolster up a sense of security that comes from the familiar and the known. While living in Nigeria, the gated community became her sphere of companionship and support:

“I was there for 8 months and in that time, I made many friends. One Indonesian lady was very good at making bead necklaces, so she conducted courses, and I would attend that. All of us expat women would sit together, and we would learn together. I still have some of those beads with me. Another lady taught us how to make photo frames. Whoever had a skill, would hold a workshop. I taught art and learnt so many crafts from the others. We tasted different kinds of food, like when it was the Indonesian lady’s class, she would bring Indonesian food... and we would talk about Indonesian culture. Just a group of women sitting together and talking about home, food, children, and learning something new - I enjoyed the multicultural experience. I felt I was learning about the whole world sitting there in that one room”.

Paradoxically, the ‘whole world’ that Shilpita refers to is not one that includes members from the receiving culture. A separate, ‘global’ community is envisaged, in which the local

remains the exotic other. However, the exposure to new cultures and new ways of life, albeit in an elite, controlled setting, made Shilpita feel proud of herself that she could adapt to change, and become more accepting of difference in order to form bonds. She began to perceive her self-identity as a global traveller who had much to gain from her sojourning across the globe. This self-imagined picture of cultural cosmopolitanism may not be what it suggests, because it remains confined to a tightly configured space within the expatriate community. Fechter, in her book titled 'Transnational Lives', rightly questions the notion that mobile lives are characterised by a series of leaps over physical and cultural boundaries. Instead, she believes that most expats attempt merely to 'channel fluidity rather than immersing themselves in it', which challenges the notion that they are 'cosmopolitan in outlook' (2007, pp.80–81).

Shilpita, and expat spouses like her, cling to the archetypal lifestyle that typifies gated expat communities and appear to practise an 'our kind-of-people cosmopolitanism', which is the opposite of what cosmopolitanism is actually meant to be - 'an uninhibited curiosity toward and celebration of cultural differences and lifestyles' (Cuperus, 2009, p.28). Even while she appreciates the uniqueness of Indonesian culture, she emplaces it within the expat/international culture that she herself belongs to. Thus, there is simultaneously a retreat to the familiar and an acknowledgement of the new. Shilpita's self-declared openness to new experiences can also be understood as a form of what Delanty calls 'cultural cosmopolitanism', which refers to 'a plurality of cosmopolitan projects by which the global and the local are combined in diverse ways', which is most likely to occur within 'transnational modes of belonging' (2006, p.35). While the openness to cultural differences may have been carefully cultivated, this attitude nevertheless allowed her to absorb and process the unfamiliar and quell any misgivings she may have had.

Strategy and Self-growth

Moving the lens closer to the lived experiences of the trailing spouses or tied movers in this study, I mark the different strategies they adopt in order to compensate for the lack of a support network in the host country, and to absorb the rupture with familiar social ecosystems that a high degree of mobility brings about. While in Singapore and the UK, Shilpita began to design strategies that would help her connect with people in everyday settings. It has been noted that trailing wives invest a great deal of effort in forging new social networks (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014), and that children and schooling offer one of the most promising avenues for the same (Beaverstock, 2005; Purkayastha, 2005).

Shilpita, for instance, would make it a point to spend time at the play area of the international schools that her children attended, “...because as a Mom, that is where you meet other expat Moms like me. Then you start talking.” Children often help break the ice and facilitate friendships in the local neighbourhood (Föbker et al. 2014). Gradually, some of those meetings changed into friendships, and she would arrange social occasions at her home where her husband and children met other families, and shared experiences, demonstrating how women can emerge as ‘social hubs’ within local settings (Wellman, 1984). Her husband’s oft-expressed approval of her social skills also made her accept the mantle of homemaker more easily:

“How I do up the house, how I take care of the kids, what classes they are going to attend, whom we invite for dinner...he knows that I know best. Where the house is concerned, all the decision-making is mine. Whichever country I am in, he will not interfere in that. Yes, the traditional role division is there - he won’t do any housework. But am I doing the equal share of finance work? No. Just because I am taking care of the house and the kids, doesn’t mean I am the weaker person. If I also took up a permanent job it would mean that I’d have to leave it whenever he got a transfer - as his wife, obviously I went everywhere with him. It’s not because I am a woman, but because he is doing a paid job, and paying taxes. I am not doing half of his work so why should he do half of mine?”

Shilpita’s acknowledgement of the status quo within their marriage, and her readiness to give up her own career prospects in favour of her husband’s, suggest that the gendered cultural norms that she grew up with continue to exert their influence over her actions. Norms that oblige women to conform to expectations of gendered behaviour that are patriarchal in nature. Yet Shilpita herself does not seem to find these familial or societal expectations to be oppressive in essence. On the contrary, she reasons to herself that what is being asked of her is not unreasonable. As Belliappa explains, women do not always wish to be set free from family obligations; while they may feel compelled to conform to societal norms in order to avoid social castigation, they might be choosing to fall into line also because they need the love and emotional support of their families which comes along with their approval of her actions as a daughter, wife, mother, or daughter-in-law (2013, p.91).

However, one can also see Shilpita’s problem-solving approach while dealing with new situations, the degree of self-reflexivity she adopts in assessing her own situation. Giddens’ theory of self-identity creates a space for individual agency and holds that within a post-traditional culture, individuals approach their identity project as a reflexive one (1991, p. 53).

Not something that is just given, but ‘something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (ibid., p.52). The narratives in this study draw attention to the manner in which a trailing spouse can display individual agency and negotiate structural constraints to create a channel for her personal needs. Shilpita therefore can be viewed not as a victim of circumstances, but as someone with an emerging sense of self, who is resourceful and empowered.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that men are more likely to migrate than women (Newbold & Bell, 2001; Amcoff & Niedomysl, 2013). It can also be argued that if the move is made with family in tow, the greater benefit accrues to the male leading spouse, rather than the trailing spouse. Many recent studies such as Blackburn (2010) working with US data, Boyle et al. (2009) drawing on UK data, Nivalainen (2004) using Finnish data, and Pailhé and Solaz (2008) using French data, corroborate this finding. This is further underlined in the work of Nilsson (2001), Åström and Westerlund (2009), and Brandén and Ström (2011), who work with Swedish data.

Yet, this assumption can be challenged, for ‘benefit’ need not always be understood in economic terms. Tied movers like Shilpita demonstrate that benefit can be interpreted in terms of self-growth. Her self-confidence grew in proportion to her success in settling into new unfamiliar surroundings, and finding ways to channel her socio-emotional needs:

“I became more confident that I can live anywhere. The people you meet while your husband is on a posting - they have also moved again and again over time, so that’s something we have in common. And sometimes the friends you make, you meet them again in different places. One family I became friendly with in Nigeria later moved to Malaysia - we would hop over to Malaysia to see them when we were posted to Singapore! Then they moved to the US, and we still visit them when we go to the US. When they come to India, they visit us. After we returned to India, we discovered that another friend we made in Singapore now lives in a gated community in Bangalore. We have made our own global community of family and friends!”

City of Opportunity

Shilpita, like many others in this study, did not return to her place of origin. Returning couples may factor in considerations into making the choice of city and kind of residence, based on factors such as a familiar cultural ambience, a wide range of employment options in software

technology and finance industries for the working spouses, international schools for their children, parental caregiving, and for trailing spouses to engage in voluntary charitable work. Bangalore is usually the first choice of most returning migrants including those who do not originally hail from the city, as it meets almost all these requisites, besides being the favoured location for software giants, multinational companies, international organisations, and research institutes. In addition, it offers a wide range of high-end gated complexes where the returnees can continue to access a higher standard of living, like the one they were accustomed to in the previous receiving countries.

Saroja Erraguntla and her husband who hailed from Hyderabad and Chennai respectively, chose Bangalore as their destination of return in 2004, because at that point in time, it was the city that offered the most opportunities for her line of work in the silicon chip industry. Amaresh Gollamudi and his wife hailed from Hyderabad but chose Bangalore as a destination because of the work opportunities it provided. Veena Advani's husband Mihir, a senior finance professional working in the US, was offered an international posting in India and he was given a choice between the cities of Bangalore and Bombay to work in. Veena was born in Bombay and still has her family there, but advised her husband to accept the Bangalore offer as *"it seemed to offer a better lifestyle for the family inside a plush gated complex; something that Bombay does not have"*.

Shilpita and her husband Dheeraj were from Delhi in northern India, but they returned to Bangalore because Dheeraj had always yearned to start something new on his own and had received an offer from his company to set up a branch of the parent company there. Shilpita saw it as an opportunity to fulfil his professional ambition, without risking their personal savings:

"I would have loved to go back to Delhi, but the company wanted someone to start a second office in Bangalore. I knew that my husband would often say, 'should I leave this job and start something of my own'? So I told him, this is the best opportunity. You won't be leaving your job - it's a company sponsored move. You are hiring new people, setting up your own team. You set up this office for them from scratch and it will be like it's your own set-up, but without the risk. He liked my advice."

Shilpita adds that for her personally, it was a much-desired move for other reasons, such as wanting her children to rediscover their roots in India, to enjoy the emotional security of

familial connections in the manner that she herself had done, to explore the possibilities for intergenerational care exchange, and above all, to feel a sense of home and belonging. Over the ten years that they moved as a family from the US to Nigeria, then to Southampton in the UK, then to Singapore, Shilpita kept missing home and struggled with feelings of being an ‘outsider’:

“I never really felt I belonged anywhere but in India, if you ask me! We got married and I joined my husband Dheeraj in the US. Then moved with him to wherever his job took him... It was a very good lifestyle, materially speaking, as Dheeraj was in a very senior position, but for me personally, it was hard. I kept missing home. It was a blur of cities and cultures that I could not really relate to. I wanted to go back to India. and I finally persuaded him”.

In 2006, Shilpita and her husband Dheeraj moved back to India, after he took up a senior position at an international firm in Bangalore. At present, they live in a villa inside a gated community at Whitefield, and travel frequently to Delhi to visit their parents.

Taking the Initiative

This study finds that most of the women returnees to India actively encouraged their spouses to make the move back, as in the case of Shilpita, or Ameera Ali who felt a really strong connection to India and felt that she *“understood the US but did not belong there”*. Ameera persuaded her husband Aarif who had lived in the US since the age of 17, and who had *“no clue how India worked”*, to return to India with their children aged 10 and 7. Though she had grown up in Kannur in north Kerala, and Aarif in Tamil Nadu, she suggested Bangalore as the return destination because she believed that as a burgeoning software capital, it offered many opportunities to her software engineer husband.

While most of the trailing spouses in this study encouraged their partners to look for opportunities in India, one of them actually facilitated the move back to India - Saroja Erraguntla. It was in 1989 that Saroja moved from her home in Hyderabad in South India to Louisiana in the US, to study for a master’s degree in Computer Engineering. In 1991, she joined an American multinational corporation and technology company in Oregon to work as a computer engineer, specialising in silicon and chip design. Saroja found herself at a very exciting stage in semiconductor manufacturing and innovation; she rode the crest of its evolution with successful projects and was recognized for her achievements. In 1994, her family proposed that she marry Tarun, who worked

with a consulting firm looking at environmental regulations and environment compliance, and after their marriage, they continued to live in Portland, Oregon.

Two years later, Tarun moved to Chicago to attend his MBA classes at an Ivy League university, but Saroja decided to continue in Portland and become a 'commuter spouse' (Gerstel and Gross, 1982, 1984), flying out to Chicago twice a month. She confesses that it was hard being separated, but "*harder giving up the job*". When her husband completed his studies, he too worked at a couple of American technology companies, before venturing to set up his own consultancy in the US. In a few years' time, he felt ready to expand his operations by looking at Asian markets. To do this, he wanted to work from India, though the idea seemed not devoid of risk. Both Tarun and Saroja had lived and worked for over 15 years in the US, but they had not built a base in India yet.

Studies have repeatedly shown that couples' migration tends to accommodate the male's career opportunities (Cooke, 2008). It is not uncommon for the employment prospects of the tied mover to dim in the light of the migration trajectory of the male spouse, which is based on his own skills and employability. Moreover, it has been argued in migration research that both men and women are socialised into playing certain roles and that wives are encouraged to defer to their husbands when making migration decisions (Shihadeh, 1991).

Yet, recent studies have shown that in a departure from this behaviour, the female white-collar partner in the dual-earner couple is increasingly unwilling to be the tied mover whose employment status is harmed by migration (Boyle et al. 2001) and is generally less willing to relocate (Markham et al., 1983). Instead, many tied movers look for suitable opportunities even whilst in the process of co-migrating. They choose to become active agents rather than passive movers (Hiller and McCaig, 2007; Kõu and Bailey, 2014).

Saroja, for instance, did not want to sacrifice her professional career and become a trailing spouse. She was not certain that she would be able to find a suitable job in India within her area of expertise. Nevertheless, she was keen on supporting her spouse, and the idea of being closer to their ageing parents appealed to both. Eventually, she herself resolved the issue. Aware that the international company she worked for, encouraged its employees to traverse between geographies and apply their skills, she approached the senior management with a suggestion:

"I knew about my company's growth and expansion plans, so I just asked whether they would like to do something in India, and could I be a part of that? They didn't have a research presence in India at that time, even though they had a mandate to expand in South Asia. They were happy that someone they trusted, wanted to move to India. Though I had been performing in management roles, I was a hands-on researcher too, and I was willing to take on different roles. So, I moved to India in 2004 with my job, and set up a whole set of labs for my company, and my husband could thus fulfil his own ambition and set up his consultancy. The timing was right, and it was providence too. I am so glad I took the initiative back then!"

The period immediately after their return was a trying one - settling back into what was only a remembered way of life. During their years in the US, they had stayed in touch with living conditions in India, as they often visited their families in Chennai and Hyderabad:

"We were never oblivious to what it took to live here. Tarun had already made a few reconnaissance trips to India to finalise his start-up plans, and he had also checked out housing options. The gated community was just becoming a rage at that point, and I knew that it was what we needed. Neither of us had lived or run a household in India. We lived here during our teens, but our parents did everything for us back then. A gated complex is completely different from the houses and surroundings in which our parents lived. People call a GC a bubble, with its sparkling clean surroundings and manicured lawns! And yes, you do pay a hefty price, but there is a support structure that you get that makes it worthwhile. These are places where children can run around freely - our GC runs into acres, and there is safety for women. You avoid the traffic, the dust and the unhygienic conditions, and all of that."

Saroja also found satisfaction at her workplace in Bangalore. As an English-speaking, transnational professional working in a multinational company in India, she was comfortably ensconced within the global knowledge economy. The steel and glass building that she worked in, represented more than an outpost of global capitalism; it also symbolised continuity with the classed, privileged work sphere that she was already familiar with. On the personal front there were many demands on Saroja, as cultural norms demanded that she prioritise family, and domestic responsibilities over her work. A senior management role in IT meant that she had to work long hours, and the divide between work and home often misted over. The 'time bind' between obligations to work and obligations to home leads to many women professionals placing family life over corporate success (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.149). For Saroja at first, this time bind became an area of dissonance. Besides having to navigate familial expectations, she had social and cultural events to attend, and

their children's schooling to be dealt with. For instance, finding the perfect school for her 4-year-old daughter was a big source of anxiety:

"The kind of schools we had attended as children in India comprised large, packed classrooms with little personal attention. In our time, we had rote learning, bad bathrooms, kneeling on the floor, and knuckles being rapped. And all that continues even today... But as parents, we always want something better for our children. I did a lot of research and decided that an international school would be the best choice - loving teachers, a loving environment. Children of expats like us formed a major chunk of the students. She fitted right in. The teachers would call her 'honey' and 'sweetie' and make her feel like she was the best thing that had happened to the school! That was what she was used to, back in the US. We wanted discipline, but we wanted it to be carried out in a good way. Not in a policing kind of way. So, the schooling problem was solved."

Other studies have found that returning to India often brings about a consolidation of 'traditional gender roles for women' (Bhatt, 2018, p.107). Saroja also found that despite having a full-time job, the domestic responsibilities that ranged from ordering the monthly gas cylinder to scaffolding the emotional well-being of her family, and being responsible for the overall household management such as training and supervision of the cook, the milkman, the driver, the gardener, and general helper - keeping the household ticking as it were, fell to her lot:

The day-to-day challenges in India are such a hassle. There has been some change in society here, but a woman's role is expected to be the same. At my company in the US, I led all our diversity and inclusion efforts, but here I can see the barriers women have to overcome, just to go to work at an office. I have the luxury of being able to afford help but it's like this - Tarun used to help out with domestic duties when we were in the US, but now he feels it is unnecessary, because we can hire help easily. He says that I am efficient enough to oversee all that. I can't argue with that, and I want things to work out, so I just manage everything!"

Although gender relations between the spouses might be altered in the migration process (Pessar and Mahler, 2003, Willis and Yeoh, 2002), these narratives suggest that return migration to India might involve a reinforcement of gendered roles. Most women professionals value their careers and perceive it as an integral part of their identity (King, 2004; Shaffer et al, 2003). Saroja does too, yet she takes primary responsibility for household duties and the well-being of her children: *"I knew I had to make it work, having done all I could to remain a working spouse, not a trailing one."* Saroja's situation intimates that 'gender is created in the behaviour

of women and men, and especially so in the division of housework and childcare' (Branden, 2014, p.952). Eventually, Saroja resigned from her job in 2016, having spent 25 years with the company by then. Not wanting to be idle, she has, since, set up an NGO (non-governmental organisation) that aims to revive interest in Indian classical music, along with a friend from within her gated community with similar interests.

Trailing Spouse and Trailing Mother

Rashmi Thomas is Saroja's immediate neighbour inside the gated complex in Bangalore. Rashmi was on an exchange program with an organisation in Switzerland from 1993 to 1994, and later migrated to the US in 1995 right after she married Joy, as he already had a job there in a software company. Shortly after, Rashmi gained admission to an Ivy League university to do a master's program in Public Policy. Thereafter, she held responsible management positions in a couple of firms in San Francisco. However, she had to give up her job when Joy was offered a senior position in another software company, and they moved to California. Rashmi found a position in California as a financial analyst, but had to relinquish it once again, when Joy moved to Japan, and she moved with him. The children had come by then, and when her husband wanted to move back to California again in the wake of a promotion, Rashmi chose to quit working for a while and be a full-time homemaker, because her work involved late nights, and frequent travelling. While making that decision, she decided to quell whatever misgivings she had about prioritising her family's well-being over her own:

"Baby-care and day-care became a big problem. I also realised that one of our careers had to be prioritised otherwise I would not be able to handle everything. So, I had some regrets about having to put my own career on the back burner, but I had to balance my priorities. Life puts you in that position sometimes. I finally decided that we would focus on his career, and I would look after the children and our home".

Accordingly, in 2003, they bought a house and prepared to settle down in the US. However, in 2006, Joy changed tracks professionally, and joined a US-based venture capital firm, which offered him the opportunity to set up a branch office in Bangalore, India. While Rashmi had mixed feelings about giving up the house that they had just bought, and moving back to India, she decided to support it in the interests of her husband's career:

"There were big opportunities here in India at that point in time. His company put him in charge of setting up the office, so he was compensated well. He was moving there as an expat, and that position meant that there would be perks

and everything, so that was good for the family. In any case, I was not working at that time. Relocating in itself was not hard, we had done it so many times before. But just letting go of things in the US and saying goodbye to people - that was tough. We didn't have relatives there, so it was mainly about friends - our children's friends, their parents, who had become part of my microcosm. Leaving all of that was painful. But I also felt that the children will gain from being surrounded by extended family members. So, I had to balance it all out in my head."

Research on migrant professional couples has indicated that while couples may uphold more egalitarian gender norms whilst living in the receiving society; once the children arrive, there is a gradual shift to more traditional role-playing, with the female spouse cast as the homemaker and the male spouse as the breadwinner (Kou et al, 2017, p.2790; Cooke, 2008). The trailing spouse finds herself becoming the trailing mother (Cooke, 2001). In the subtext of Rashmi's words above, can be found traces of the displacement endured during the process of letting go and moving back, but also a note of satisfaction that their mobility was constructive in the long run, that migration had been a worthwhile experience.

In 2006, they returned to India and took up residence in a rented villa inside Meadow View Estate, one of Bangalore's earliest gated complexes. When the stay extended beyond the stipulated five-year period, the couple bought the present villa inside the new sprawling gated complex - Belle Green Paradise. Both Rashmi and Joy feel that they made the right decision in making the move back to India, as they could also look after their ageing parents, and Joy's autistic sibling who needs medical care. Research has shown that caregiving is a dominant motive for onward or return migration (Köu and Bailey 2014; Mazzucato and Schans, 2011). While Joy found work satisfaction in funding projects by budding entrepreneurs that had the potential for bringing about developmental change in India, Rashmi discovered that there were opportunities in the non-profit sector - she now volunteers at a centre for battered women.

Rashmi emphasises that she did not feel herself under any undue pressure to trail along with her husband:

"Yes, maybe there was a certain conditioning that I could not ignore, because in India they expect the women to put the family above self. However, even in India, there are lots of women who balance a career and their home life. Right now, I believe that by moving everywhere with my husband, I accomplished my goals for our family - we stayed together, I looked after the kids, helped them develop. I learnt a lot on our travels, I learnt that everybody's view is valid if you see it

from their point of view. That helped me to adjust to Indian society after coming back. But honestly, I am uncomfortable with the term 'trailing spouse' - I think the term denigrates the woman a little bit. It implies that the woman hasn't made a choice. It may seem as though someone like me is dropping everything, and just moving along with the family, but actually, it is a choice I am making. And I still have choices to make in the future... nothing is final yet."

Finding 'Balance'

Rashmi's account is reflective of the twisting flexure of the life course that a trailing spouse must navigate during processes of global mobility. Even though she had a postgraduate degree from a prestigious university, and was beginning to climb up the corporate ladder, she wielded a balancing pole while recalibrating her life course. All through her journey, Rashmi focused on attaining 'balance' but did not question her own motivation or need to do so. This notion of 'balance' can be sourced to the culturally imposed moral compass that subconsciously influences her actions, and allows her to enact 'respectable femininity, a critical symbolic performance' which Radhakrishnan describes as 'the dominant model of femininity in India's transnational class' (2011, p. 147), and critical to achieving structural stability within the interiority of family life.

A sense of 'balance' also drove Veena Advani to make mobility decisions that were not always favourable to her own professional graph. Growing up in the city of Bombay, Veena had always harboured a desire to move to the US one day. In 1993, with an undergraduate degree in Pharmacy from India, she enrolled for a management degree course in Iowa, and graduated with an MBA in International Business and Marketing. It was in Ohio that she met Mihir, who was also studying for a management degree, and in 1996, they were married. Moving to Chicago, both Mihir and Veena embarked on their career paths. Veena began working as a Product Manager at a statistical software company and grew within the ranks to a senior position. In 2001, when her husband changed his job and moved to Naperville, Veena gave up her job and moved with him. She worked for two other firms in management roles, until 2003 when her daughter was born. Reluctant to be a stay-at-home spouse and mother, Veena demonstrated how women can develop 'coping strategies' and become 'active negotiators' in the context of skilled migration (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998, p.162). She turned entrepreneur and set up a chemical trading company of her own in 2004, sourcing chemicals from China and South Korea, for clients in the US, Canada, and Brazil:

"It was difficult with the baby, but the other option was to do nothing....and that I wasn't willing to do. Working from home, I somehow managed the baby, and my business which began to do really well!"

However, in 2009, when her husband accepted an offer from a major financial firm to head the Asset Management division in India, Veena found herself at crossroads again:

"It was a very good offer for Mihir, and we considered it seriously because it was meant to be a 2-year stint. The children were very young - just 4 years and 6 years old, so we knew they would adjust to their new surroundings; both our parents are in India too. At that point I felt that I could not say no, I had to balance everything."

In 2009, she returned with her husband and children to India, after spending 17 years in the US:

"It was a bit of a wrench leaving everything in the US. I had reached a certain position in my professional life. But my attitude was - we have lived that life, now let's see what we can do here, let's try this new life. Let's give the children the chance to experience life in the same society that we grew up in. I agree though, that living in a gated community is not like reliving the childhood we had. The GC is completely different, but it gave us a soft landing in a country that came as a bit of a shock at first. Still, it is our own country."

Once the initial euphoria of being back in the home society wore off, Veena realised that she would have to physically move her own firm from the US to India. That task, in addition to the challenges of putting down roots in a country that she had to *"get to know all over again"* proved challenging:

"Adjusting back to India was tough - the infrastructure is so bad, and the pollution. For my husband it was tough because he had to work in corporate India, and he had to settle into a different work culture. For me it was easier because for the first few years after returning, I still had my own business, and that kept me happy. Later it became tough to manage the time zones, the payments were not coming in on time. It was difficult because I was not in the same country where my clients were. Working from the US was easier than working from India. So, I decided to slow down, and finally, I had to shut the whole business down".

What was meant to be a 2-year stay in India has lengthened into 11 years now. In the intervening period between the closing down of her business and entering the next phase in her life, Veena experienced precarity and anxiety, a condition characterised by liminality (Van

Gennep, 1961; Turner, 1970), wherein she felt as if she were caught medially between what was, and what was still to be. After struggling with trying conditions of work stasis for a long period, and experiencing a vacuum in her life due to the absence of a professional identity, Veena once again reinvented her career by moving into the NGO sector:

"I mulled over my options, and I felt that I have the people skills, the ability to engage meaningfully with the social sector. I started at the grassroots level. I became a volunteer in 2011 at this NGO called Whitefield Ready, so I used to teach English to government school children. There was an Agastya International Foundation van that used to come around to one of the schools. Then I thought, why not work in the NGO itself? They needed someone with a science as well as marketing background. I got the job. Over the last couple of years, I have raised awareness of their work, and I have brought in almost 25 donors, so it has worked out well overall."

Charitable work became a refuge for Veena. Despite the relative newness of the workplace in India, and the pressures she admits she is still under, to juggle her work and home commitments, Veena is glad that she made the choice to prioritise her husband's career and return to India:

"See, it kept us together as a family, and he is doing very well. We have been able to invest well in two properties in Bangalore, and life is, materially speaking, very comfortable inside this gated complex. Frankly, if we were not living in a GC, we might have gone back again! From a professional point of view, I have found a niche area where I can apply my skills, and who knows, if we return to the US one day, this experience in the social sector will come in handy. Sometimes I do miss being a highly paid professional, the way I was in the US, but I am glad I supported Mihir."

Conclusion

This chapter unpacks the trailing spouse's subjective experience of precarity and occupational insecurity, within the context of highly skilled global mobility. Migration decisions are often sparked by work or education aspirations (Klis and Mulder, 2008) and most often, the decision-making is tilted in favour of the male spouse, while the female spouse remains the tied mover, often referred to as a 'trailing spouse' making the 'woman's sacrifice' (Amcoff and Niedomysl, 2015). While the male professional spouse immerses himself in charting his own career graph, the wife is likely to accept her position as the partner not in paid employment; and is sometimes pitied as the one 'living in a golden cage' (Fechter, 2007, p.41). Existing literature on

tied movers takes a markedly deficit view of their situation and focuses largely on their lives as wives and mothers (Shinozaki, 2014), thus training the research lens narrowly on their precarious and questionably privileged lives. However, I note that the trailing spouses in this study show resilience in engaging with new environments, and ingenuity in reinventing their professional lives when the opportunity arises.

The delicate balancing of power within the marital relationship is often influenced by gender role ideology, which propounds that a woman's family responsibilities must far outweigh her professional responsibilities, whereas the reverse would hold true for men (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). The calibration of power is thus likely to be skewed in favour of the male working spouse, and undoubtedly, this form of gendered behaviour shapes many migration decisions. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that trailing spouses are unassertive or passive. They can be active negotiators in the context of skilled migration and can develop various coping strategies to deal with their situation (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998, p.162). The very willingness to relocate and adjust to changing life situations, can be understood as one kind of coping strategy.

Findings from several studies have indicated that when the family migrates together as a single unit, it is the male working spouse who benefits more than the trailing spouse. This assumption is open to question, for 'benefit' need not always be understood in economic terms. The accounts of tied movers like Shilpita suggest that benefit can be interpreted in terms of self-growth. For Shilpita, family migration meant putting her husband's career graph above her own development as an artist. However, one can also see her pragmatism and adaptability while dealing with new situations. The degree of self-reflexivity she adopted in assessing her own situation helped her to see the advantages of her position as a trailing spouse. Shilpita therefore can be viewed not as a victim of circumstances, but as an individual who is proactive and empowered.

Recent studies have shown that the female white-collar partner in the dual-earner couple is displaying increasing unwillingness to be the tied mover whose employment status is harmed by migration. Instead, many tied movers look for suitable opportunities even whilst in the process of co-migrating, choosing to become 'active agents rather than passive movers' (Kou et al, 2017, p. 2791). Saroja Erraguntla is a case in point. Saroja not just supported the move back to India but also facilitated it, and in the process secured her own professional identity.

Rashmi strived for 'balance' as she took stock of her options and decided on her priorities. Individual achievement jostled for space with the notion of 'family' and Rashmi, in her roles as wife and mother, believed that an optimum balance could be achieved if she played a supportive role. Eschewing the term 'trailing spouse', Rashmi reiterates that she made a conscious choice to move with her husband whenever he had to. She believes that her own story is yet unfinished; her travels have helped her see that one can express oneself in different ways.

Veena Advani's story also illustrates that precarity in mobility can be offset by resilience, and the ability to imagine alternative realities for themselves. Her account, like that of the other trailing spouses also reveals a willingness to relocate, a ready acquiescence to the plans of her mobile professional spouse, and emotional support and cooperation - all of which goes a long way in rendering the migration a success.

While migrant professionals from the Global South are often highly paid for their services, they carry with them on their journeys, an undercurrent of precarity which stems not just from anxiety about issues of citizenship, or insecurity about job loss (Doogan, 2015), but also from their own notions of conflicted identity and belonging. Under such conditions, a spouse's willingness to relocate, and even more crucially, her competence at accessing networks and forging connections in a new socio-cultural milieu, will have a significant influence on the working spouse's own adjustment to his new responsibilities (Bhaskar, Shrinivas et al, 2005; Brown, 2008). In the process, it is the trailing spouse who also provides a ready social network for the male working spouse who may not have the time or resources to do it on his own. As it has been highlighted in the literature, often it is the women who 'create new social ties, integrate and run the joint network ... men tend to join their spouse's networks more than the opposite' (Spalter, 2010, p.334).

The narratives of nearly all the female trailing spouses in this study reveal the little ways in which they turn the lens back on themselves, how they make sense of and manage their feelings, and regain control over their circumstances. This study casts light on the emotions they experience through their engagement with the surrounding environment (Milton, 2005; Solomon, 2004), and reveals a shift to reflexivity, a seeking of self, an earnest effort to find the means, an outlet, for self-validation. An inward change becomes evident, as these women, far from being docile creatures of circumstance, actively negotiate emotions of displacement and diffusion, and employ strategies to chart for themselves a path of self-fulfilment.

A trailing spouse's contribution to the well-being of her working spouse and her family is an outcome of her emotional labour, and her agency in turning around the constraints of her position such that the deficit becomes an advantage. This analysis poses wider implications for the study of trailing spouses within mobility discourses about migrant professionals. Further, it calls for a reconceptualizing and recasting of the very term 'trailing spouse', which connotes passivity, and does little justice to the agentic and partnering role that the female spouse plays at every stage of the migration process. Thus, this chapter marks a shift away from a discourse that devalues the non-wage labour of the female 'trailing spouse'; it acknowledges the degree of agency she exercises in migration decision-making and demonstrates how her support is critical to the success of the relocation itself.

Chapter 7

Narratives of Resettlement

‘But why did you come back in the first place?’

*“‘Itna achha chal raha tha, sab chod kar aaye ho... lekin aap aaye hi kyon?’
 (‘everything was going well for you, but you left it all to come back here... why?
 why would you come back?’). In the first two years after we returned, this is what
 my relatives and neighbours would ask me almost every time we met. It was so
 discouraging. You know, when we used to visit India in the past, we were seen as
 these rich people... A little bit superior to other Indians. But now when we are
 living here, they try to overpower us by saying ‘You are new to India,
 you don’t know how things have changed. And nobody really helps you after a point
 because their attitude ranges from a sarcastic ‘aap log khud aaye ho na’
 (it was your own decision to return) to a cynical ‘yahan pe aise hi hota hai’ (it is like
 this only in India). Some people are blunt and say - ‘there are many people who go
 back...how long will you continue here?’. Most of the time they are patronising - ‘I
 don’t know how you will survive here...but why did you come
 back in the first place?’*

- Lata Gollamudi, Bangalore

Among the everyday challenges that returnees often face in their home society is the frequent need to justify their decision to return to various members of family and community. Adaptation to the home society where one is not just visiting, but putting down roots all over again, poses many challenges. The struggle to win acceptance and be welcomed as people who are serious about their intent to stay, who no longer wanted to be mere sojourners in their home country, is carried out on shifting emotional ground. Returnees must make great efforts to disregard the derision and casual dismissal of their reasons to return, and to fob off unsolicited advice on how to readapt to the home society.

Lata evinces disappointment at a situation where *“our own people were waiting for us to give up and go back again... if you try to say something they will stop you by saying ‘no, no, India has changed, that’s not how it is... you won’t be able to get adjusted here’*. The experience of having her behaviour constantly scrutinised, even judged, added to her burden of altered work and personal life commitments, the need to set up new social networks and reconnect with existing ones, and adjustment to less than adequate infrastructural facilities.

Expectations and Adaptation

While many studies have provided insights into migrant adaptation success in the receiving society, using the metrics of the migrant's level of social and economic integration, and acquisition of legal status such as permanent residency or citizenship, this study finds a paucity of research on migrant adaptation within the setting of return migration to the Global South. The family plays a central role in processes of emigration as well as integration in the host country (Brettell, 2007; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). Yet there is still a significant gap in the literature about the importance of interpersonal networks such as the family in both facilitating, and at times, hindering return migration and post-return settlement in the home society. This chapter in my thesis addresses this gap and investigates the importance of these networks in shaping the resettlement process for returnees to India.

In the previous chapter, I have delved into the ways 'trailing spouses' (Cangi'a, 2017) navigate the complexities of both settlement into the receiving society, and resettlement into the home society after return migration, by devising various coping mechanisms to deal with changing socio-cultural settings, the need to prioritise their husband's career over their own, as well as societal expectations of gendered behaviour. Here in this chapter, I build on that inquiry, and employ a critical lens on the influence of family, extended family, friendship, and community ties on the returnees' quality of resettlement, and their experience of well-being in the home society.

Scholars like Lewis and Williams (1986) have pointed to the link between a cooperative and welcoming locality, and a positive return migration experience. The behaviour of the receiving society towards the returnee can significantly influence their future decision to stay and settle in the home country, or to migrate once again, or to embark on the path of circular migration. Thus, the possibility of permanent settlement in the home society depends greatly on the ability of each returnee to adapt to their environment, and their capacity to find the golden mean between expectation and actuality. I employ this conception as an analytical tool to tease out the interconnecting threads between return migration, expectation fulfilment, and circular migration.

In his study about Cape Verdean migrants, Carling (2004, p.116) addresses migration as a culturally defined concept that 'includes a parcel of expectations regarding the nature and consequences of migration.' This concept can be applied equally to the phenomenon of return migration - expectations are heightened in the context of return. In an older study by

De Jong *et al.* (1983, pp.470-484), a value-expectancy model is used to identify and explain migration intentions that are key to the migration decision-making process.

According to this framework, the motive of the migrant to improve her/his own or the family's quality of life becomes central to the migration decision-making process. The subjective expectation about where that goal can be met, in which setting will the desired well-being of the individual or the family be achieved, will determine the direction of migration. In this study, I apply the value-expectancy model normally used in the pre-migration process, to examine the role of expectations of returnees in the post-return migration period. I focus on their narratives of resettlement to fathom the extent to which their expectations have been fulfilled or not, and in what manner and to what degree that outcome can influence future migratory processes.

Preparing for return: Networks and Resources

The participants in this study, who have enjoyed both flexibility and mobility, have expressed their awareness of the need for adaptation after going home. Adaptation as Cassarino explains, does not imply that they must abandon their multiple identities (2004), but that they can work from the vantage point of self-awareness. When confronted with the challenges of reintegration, they can draw on their experiences of transnational mobility, and their painstakingly built-up social networks in the home country prior to return (Portes, 1999), to gain a sense of stability. Reintegration can also be interpreted as 're- adaptation of return migrants' (Gmelch, 1980).

Preparation for return began much in advance of the return. As the previous chapters in this thesis have stated, transmigrants today actively construct and maintain multiple bonds - familial, economic, social, and cultural that spans both host and home country (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc, 1994). A robust exchange of resources sustains these networks, creating long-term, interpersonal relationships. Maintained over great distances, these cross-border, interpersonal networks can be seen as a 'collectively shared subjective awareness' (Laumann et al. 1983, p.21) which involves the exchange of information, assistance and obligation (Fleischer, 2013). From a social network point of view, returnees can be understood as being the 'bearers of tangible and intangible resources' who have also maintained strong linkages to their origin countries (Cassarino, 2004, p.265). The migrants' family networks

represent a crucial form of social capital, understood as: ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119).

The participants in this study worked hard on maintaining such interpersonal networks in their home country prior to return, and these connections were to prove beneficial in the return setting. Within the transnational spaces they occupied, values and norms were also being transmitted from one generation to another. Both emotional and financial support was offered on both sides – remittances were flowing back into the home country, and after the migrants returned to the home society, and it was understood that they would draw on the financial resources and social connections of family members to tide them through the initial period of settling in.

Migrants’ expectations and their ability to adjust and function in the receiving country are also closely related to information flows before leaving (Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2009). By participating in the social, cultural, economic, and political life in the country of origin, returnees make attempts to reintegrate with the home society even before return (Cassarino, 2004, p.127). Once home, a key expectation is that they acquire social acceptance within the extended family, friends, as well as in the community.

The Goal is to Fit Back in

The returnees in this study have had different migration life cycles and transnational experiences, yet almost all of them express two main motivations to return to their country of origin - the desire to spend time with ageing parents, and to give their children an exposure to the kind of cultural and social life that they themselves had experienced in their early years. The goal is to fit back into the society they had left, so that they can pick up where they had left off. To do this, returnees must first adopt practices of emplacement (Upadhyaya, 2013) and work towards putting down roots again in the home society, which reflects their level of ‘preparedness’ for return (Cassarino, 2004).

However, at this juncture, a mismatch between the returnee’s idealized memories of the homeland and the changed reality of homeland (Tannenbaum, 2007), as also their treatment by the home society (Neto, 2012) are factors that can substantially impact the quality of resettlement. Felix Neto bases his findings on research carried out amongst adolescents who

returned to Portugal and met with discriminatory attitudes which consequently shaped the degree of adaptation to their home country. In another study by Sussman, on return migration to Hong Kong (2010), she refers to the resentment of the locals towards the wealthier returnees who can, upon return, afford to buy bigger houses or property, or set up a business. She adds that in cases where the returnees or 'remigrants' as she calls them were met with a welcoming, more flexible attitude, they reported feeling positive about 'returning home'. Reuniting with former friends can prove difficult, due to disparate experiences, attitudes, and interests (Pocock and McIntosh, 2011) - all of it coalesces into feelings of alienation and disaffection. 'Old clothes that no longer fit' is how Fourn and Schiller (2001) described the response of Haiti returning migrants to the homeland.

Most returnees begin the task of re-adaptation by setting up the rhythms of everyday living. It was in that initial stage of their return that Lata and Amaresh Gollamudi had their first moments of disquiet when they ran up against practices of corruption in everyday transactions, a system that they had lost touch with. The corruption that returning migrants encounter in their home country at various stages of their resettlement, can act as a barrier to feelings of well-being. According to the UNDP, most international migrants migrate to a country with a higher level of human development than their country of origin (2009). For returnees who have become used to the standards of a low-corruption society, it can produce a sense of 'social alienation' (Carling et al, 2015, p.22). Erlend Paasche in his study of the impact of corruption on the reintegration experiences of Iraqi Kurds upon return from Europe, argues that while standard of living issues and developmental policies do affect returnees' experience of resettlement, corruption is a major alienating influence (2016, p.1077).

'We didn't expect this'

The much-anticipated return to their mythical homeland was met with many hurdles in that first year. The couple realised then that they had to begin from scratch, to adjust, and adapt to new, not always welcome, experiences. Amaresh refers to the struggle the family had, in the first few months after coming back to India:

"We didn't expect the reality to be so extreme. My first posting was to Gurgaon, a city located southwest of New Delhi. We were just running around trying to cut the red tape and get the paperwork done. I had to leave for Australia to wind up a few things, and Lata had to manage alone with our kids,

living in a guesthouse - as we hadn't bought a house at that point. Nothing was simple or straight-forward. It was our first brush with bribery and corruption in this country. Money speaks at every turn. You either have to know someone at the office in question to get things done or pay money to get a certificate/licence/admission, anything. We didn't have any credit history in India, that was a problem. But our relatives helped us find an apartment through an estate agent he knew (we would have been duped otherwise); another relative helped us buy a car, get school admission, a bank account, a cooking gas connection etc. You go to a gas agency, they say 'ho jayega' (it will get done), but nothing happens. We just had to pay cash if we wanted to get anything done. And no receipts for that!"

Lata recalls that initially, her children felt intimidated, even alienated, by the dominance of the Hindi language they heard spoken on the streets, the crowds that seemed to come right at them at shopping malls so that they had to move aside swiftly before a collision occurred:

"The deafening noise, the crowds, the difficulty in finding clean, fresh vegetables and fruits ... For the previous 15 years I had enjoyed all the facilities in Australia, here I had to start all over. Where to find everything? I had to ask our neighbours but most of them looked on us as strangers, sometimes people referred to us as 'Madrasis' behind our backs. We are south Indian, and there are five southern states, yet for north Indians, all south Indians are 'Madrasis' regardless of whether they belong to Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, or Karnataka! Somehow, I felt that we didn't fit in. The culture was too North Indian... their way of talking and thinking, their cuisine. Though I had taken my children for special classes in Hindi every weekend for many years, they couldn't cope with the fluency of the Hindi spoken here. Anyway, within a year we decided to move to Bangalore, where things seemed better in terms of safety and culture."

'Othering' the south of India, and vice versa, are commonly expressed attitudes in India in discussions about the north-south divide, and perceived differences based on colour and culture have found their way into mass media. A perception of south Indians as 'nerdy' while north Indians are 'gora-chitta' (fair and good-looking) are only a few of the biases that permeate everyday social exchanges (Vetticaud, 2017). The choice of Hindi as the national language has been a contentious issue since 1965. The complexities of language-based identity which intersects with other identities has consistently sparked Hindi versus non-Hindi debates in both political and cultural circles in the country (Ranjan, 2021).

Moreover, films, literature and television have consistently reproduced stereotypes of the ‘*Madrasi*’ (Shrivastava, 2018), while tropes based on skin colour (the fair-skinned North Indians contrasted with the dark-skinned ‘black’ South Indian) have proved very popular (Penmetsa, 2021). Mishra in her paper highlighting India’s issues of colourism, points to the prevailing exclusionary and discriminatory attitudes in society based on the skin tone of the individual (2015).

Thus, Lata’s assertion that ‘*things are better*’ in Bangalore when compared to Gurgaon could possibly stem from the entrenched social attitude in India that the north and the south are vastly different from each other in socio-political and cultural spheres. While Lata states that her need to return to India rose from a longing to return to her roots, she believes that it was only satisfied when she set up home later in Bangalore in 2015:

“We sold our house in Melbourne and bought a nice house in Bangalore. Our kind of vegetables, markets, even the language – not so much Hindi. Good international schools, lots of classical music events. Mentally, we were satisfied, thinking that we have finally reached one place where we are going to settle for a very long time – we are not going to move. We are going to stay here forever”.

There was also a practical concern about the safety of her daughter that influenced her consideration of which city they wanted to settle in finally:

“Being a woman, I was afraid to walk alone on the road in Delhi or Gurgaon. You are always scared - kya ho jayega? That horrifying Nirbhaya case had just happened a year before we arrived, and it was so fresh in our minds. We could not send my daughter alone anywhere. Or she had to be very street-smart, but both my kids were very young and naive... It was scary, the streets in Delhi are so deserted by evening. Bangalore is better.”*

{* Nirbhaya case - The 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder case}.

‘This is India, not Australia’

However, despite all the mental and practical preparations for resettlement, Lata had not anticipated the change in attitude of family, friends and neighbours, that occurred gradually over the months following her return to India. Lata reveals that she made a conscious effort not to make mental comparisons between Australia and India in her daily life. Yet she found herself constantly defending her family’s motives to return, and justifying her lifestyle choices in India to visitors, old friends, and relatives alike.

Her decision to be self-reliant at home - doing most of the housework, and all of the cooking herself, the way she had been doing in Australia in all the years they were there, was met with a degree of derision by her relatives. *“Yeh Australia nahin hai”* (this is not Australia) was the usual reaction:

“Even simple things like folding our clothes after washing them and placing them in the cupboard was criticised - ‘oh there in Australia you may have to do these things yourself! Here we have servants to do all this’. For anything they will respond by saying ‘this is not Australia okay... Here things are like this only - ulta-pulta (topsy-turvy)’. At the same time, to my smallest complaint they would respond flatly - ‘This is India, not Australia’, implying that I needed to realise where I am before complaining, and in any case, since I myself had chosen to come back, what right did I have to complain?”

Even while they attempt to get a grip on, and stabilise their identities, returnees struggle to come to terms with the disjuncture between ‘home’ as they had conceptualised it before return migration, and the home they encounter after return (Ralph, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Research has shown that while trying to re-establish connections, many returning migrants begin to doubt whether they ‘belong’ to the home society. This is reflective of the ‘social element of belonging that conditions home and identity’ which is not so much about the familiar but about feeling included or excluded in some way (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p.523).

“The worst thing was that my relatives would constantly say, ‘don’t speak in English, don’t show you have so much money’. And their whole attitude was so derisive - ‘you people decided to return, nobody asked you to’. It was like we didn’t belong here”. - Lata Gollamudi

Often, Lata would put up a spirited defence and argue that they might have lived abroad for 16 years, but for 25 years before that, they had lived in India, and that she was familiar with what it meant to live in a community and in a joint family:

“We know what our parents taught us here in India, that’s why I fold up my own bedsheet when I get up, or cut vegetables on my own, or apply oil on my hair... We know our customs, so why are you bringing Australia in the middle of every discussion? But they will continue to say – no, this is all Australian behaviour you are showing”.

This suggests that returnees like Lata and her family cannot easily shrug off their ‘foreign’ identities; her so-called ‘Australian behaviour’ remains inextricably linked to her previous life in the receiving country, which shapes how she is identified or accepted in the present.

At times, Lata herself would bring facets of her lifestyle in Australia in her exchanges with friends and relatives. During everyday conversations, she would often brandish her exposure to global culture and knowledge of systems, as for instance when it came to discussions of schools and the ease of getting admission:

“People here were surprised when I told them about how the education system is designed in Australia...every suburb has its own schools, and they are bound to give admission if you live in that suburb. I don’t have to struggle the way I have to do here. In India, even if I apply in my neighbourhood where the school is just across the street, I have no guarantee that I will get admission. In Australia it is possible for your child to get a very high standard of education without paying fees.”

Or if the discussion was about preparing their children’s favourite snacks:

“Oh, the food here – my kids didn’t even like the taste of bread in India. You get such wonderful varieties of artisan bread in Australia!”

It bothered Lata that she had to repeatedly explain her actions to the people around her. Many of them were the same people who used to welcome them as foreign-returned relatives bringing gifts and news of a foreign land and accorded their views unquestioned respect when they were on their annual visits home. There was also intense emotional labour involved in providing appropriate responses to invasive questioning about their motivations to return to India. Lata expresses her feelings about the seemingly casual probing on whether the return to India was precipitated by her husband Amaresh losing his job:

“So inquisitive! People were trying to find out about our financial condition after we came back. You know, whether we are taking a train or a flight, whether Amaresh travels by Business Class or Economy... it was unsettling. I remember, before we returned, we were asked by our Indian friends - ‘what is there in India for you to go back to?’ I had forgotten how nosey people can be...they want to find out everything about you, and why you came back. So, we had to constantly justify our decision to return. I kept saying that it was so that our children could be exposed to Indian culture in the original setting, but they would shake their heads in disbelief!”

For transnational Indian migrants like Lata and her family, this came as a rude shock. Through all her 16 years in Australia, Lata had worked hard at preventing her children from becoming ‘Westernised’ and encouraged them to adopt ‘Indian culture’. To have her efforts not given due validation was unsettling for Lata.

Reclaiming 'Indian Culture'

Intergenerational cultural reproduction or 'the passing on of traditions and affiliations from one generation to another' is an integral part of everyday life for many transnational migrants (Kibria 2009, p.28). Like many diasporic Indians belonging to the majority Hindu community, Lata harboured notions of 'Indian culture' that are tied to the mast of Hindu religious practices, albeit in an amended streamlined form wherein practices of Hinduism are 'homogenized to produce, reinforce, and promote an idea of Indianness that cannot be separated from Hinduism' (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.174). Prema Kurien in her book on the transplantation and transformation of Hinduism in the United States describes the rise of an American Hinduism (2007) that can be linked to the growing popularity of Hindutva or 'Hindu nationalism'. Kurien suggests that it is becoming the 'hegemonic voice' of Indian Hindu Americans in a way that has never been seen before, providing a ready guide to 'the obligations of good Hindus' (ibid., p.x) including taking their children to various *bala vihar*s located inside temples or other religious centres, *satsangs* or local religious meets, to imbibe Hinduism and 'Indian culture' (ibid., p.1).

Lata and Amaresh's self-construction of identity appears to reflect this fusion of the notions of Indianness and Hinduism. They enrolled the family in multiple Indian cultural associations and celebrated Indian festivals such as Diwali and Holi along with other expatriate Indian families. Transnational Hindu cultural associations have been springing up across the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and other countries, offering an easily accessible route to 'adapting Hinduism to global conditions of mobility and diasporic belonging' (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.174). The mushrooming of these community associations could be interpreted as a form of seeking legitimacy in public spaces by diasporic members, calling for 'acceptance of group-specific values and practices, including safeguarding these in law' (Vertovec, 1999, p.12). Apart from assuaging 'immigrant nostalgia', the celebration of these community festivals also serves as a form of tutorial to familiarise the offspring of immigrants with their Indian heritage (Dasgupta, 1998, p.954).

Under Lata's tutelage, her children identified 'Indian culture' as preserving values and customs such as touching the feet of elders, upholding the norms of social hierarchy, adherence to marriage and mourning rituals, practising yoga and vegetarianism. Lata also ensured that the children took formal classes in Hindi at the Victoria School of Languages every weekend. The

parents would accompany them and wait outside the school while they were in class; they practised speaking Hindi every now and then, while also speaking the mother tongue Telugu at home, and cooked only Indian vegetarian food at home. The orthodoxy of her Brahmanic rituals was held up as a marker of Indianness and some of the rigidity of ceremonial practice crept into their daily lives. Lata's frenzied search for the sacred *tulsi* plant in Melbourne would begin a week prior to the day of a festival:

"There are three kinds of tulsi plants, which include Rama (green leaf), Shyama or Krishna (purple leaf) and Vana (wild leaf). Venkat would try to procure at least one of them from a garden or he would mail-order them. I couldn't do without them for our worship. Even our children knew that it was a symbol of the goddess Laxmi – the goddess of wealth both spiritually and materially. As Indians we carry our tulsi everywhere".

Cultural reproduction in the host society thus draws on memories of the past to create spaces of belonging in the present. While it can be argued that the celebration of particularistic festivals in the receiving societies of the West represents 'a reification and packaging of culture' (Vertovec, 1999), it does play an important role in supporting the immigrant community's need for an assertion of cultural identity in the receiving society. South Asian immigrant communities also turn to Indian temples that offer both spiritual succour and cultural resources for the Indian immigrant community. The Edinburgh Mandir (Temple) in Scotland is one such space. The weekends find children running about dressed in Indian ethnic wear, while adults sit cross-legged on the floor praying to a long array of colourfully decorated deities. The chanting of mantras merges with a steady murmur of conversation as men and women move about, greeting others and enquiring about their lives. The tangible merges with intangible, sensorial imaginings to create a fount of shared memories.

"I rejoice in the colour," says Upasna Basavaraju, who is a software engineer like her husband Murli. The couple, who migrated to the UK in 2017, and live and work in Scotland, make the two-hour drive from their suburban home to the Edinburgh Mandir every weekend. Murli remarks, *"But I feel we are in a vacuum now..."* Murli often carries *pedas* (an Indian sweet) to the Mandir and distributes it amongst the devotees:

"These customs remind us of home. We enjoy hearing native languages being spoken – Hindi, Tamil, Marathi. This place makes me think of my visits to the temple with my grandparents back in Andhra Pradesh, I feel bad sometimes

that my children will not know that life, that is why I bring my little son here so that we can remember our old ways."

Distributing sweets at the Edinburgh Temple evoked the memory of his previous life in India. He recalls how once, when he had bought a Yamaha bike back in India, to celebrate getting his first job, everybody in the neighbourhood gathered around to admire it; a box of sweets was opened and distributed, as was the norm. He says ruefully, *"But even if I buy a big house here now, there is nobody to see it!"*

The ability to access and mobilise cultural resources can translate into everyday 'family practices' (Morgan, 2011). The compulsion to transplant Indian cultural traditions to their habitus in the receiving country and transmit those cultural values to the next generation could be linked to an inherent belief in the 'indestructibility of Indian culture - even removed from the home country' (Khandelwal, 2002, p.35). When the children of first-generation immigrants attain adulthood, they may or may not choose to maintain multiple identities like their parents, however, the effects of being raised in a strong transnational social field could linger on in their adult lives. The social networks they access along with their parents, could well prove useful later in both receiving and home countries, and influence their mobile trajectories (Levitt, 2001, p.1226).

Studies have shown that Asian Indian immigrants display a tendency to selectively acculturate. While they might adapt to social interactions, work culture, and dress etiquette of the receiving society, they continue to uphold their cultural and religious customs in the domestic sphere (Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). Many transmigrants embrace 'bicultural functioning' whereby they optimise the economic or educational opportunities available to them in the receiving country (Prathikanti, 1997), yet maintain a keen sense of their own native culture (Dasgupta, 1986). Women migrants may adopt bicultural behaviour primarily because of the early immersion in transactional gendered socialisation in their home country (Jayakar, 1994).

Articulations of Indianness

Lata Gollamudi held a few paid jobs in the early years after migrating to Australia, then settled for volunteer jobs, besides obtaining a diploma in counselling and practising it as a part-time occupation. Firmly adhering to the prescribed norms of her own upbringing, Lata chose to work

part-time because *“it is my duty as a woman to be there for the family... it was always understood that my husband would be the main earning person.”*

While at work, Lata would carefully design her appearance so that she appeared professional but retained *“a touch of Indian identity”*:

“I would wear different attire for different occasions in Australia - but my bindi was always there, whether I wore jeans or something else. With a saree it would be prominent, with jeans it would be a small dot. But it was there. My daughter and I always wore one, because we are Hindus. That spot on the forehead is one of the pressure points, it is the third eye which you cover with holy ash or a bindi; these are things taught to us by our mothers. Like wearing a nose-ring – it helps to control a woman’s anger.”

After the family returned to India, Lata’s articulations of Indianness were renewed with increased vigour. She took pride in the way in which her children greeted visitors, variously touching their feet, embracing them, or doing a simple namaste depending on the nature of the relationship. She kept a watch on how they behaved with their grandparents, and other relatives, and expressed satisfaction at the fact that she was able to open up an area of belonging for them:

“They could now see that it was not just Mum and Dad’s insistence, but that there was a whole community – the community they belonged to, that followed these cultural rules. It’s the small things - like helping their parents carry things, or speaking nicely to the elders in the family, or not telling parents where they are. You see, I noticed that our neighbours and friends in Australia were not always treated respectfully by their children, including some Indian families. So, we didn’t want that.”

Nonetheless, Lata is keen on holding fast to their upper caste status, and has a different set of cultural values to impart to her daughter and her son:

“My son must remember that he wears the sacred thread, that he is a caste Brahmin. He cannot marry someone from another caste. Though we are liberal people... still, someone who practises our traditions will be better for the family. My daughter also must adjust to various expectations right... So even when we were abroad, though the kids would do many chores around the house, the serving of the food and the clearing away was done by me - that is a woman’s job as per our culture. As a wife and mother, my daughter will have to do it one day, not my son. But I did tell my son that when he goes to a friend’s house in

Australia, he has to do it, because they don't know our culture. Nowadays even in some parts of India, both men and women do all the work. But when we are with elderly people in India, I have to behave properly. I have to respect the culture."

However, there came a time shortly after returning to India, during the resettlement period, when she found herself questioning the rigidity of the cultural framework she had grown up within and had willingly embraced again after returning to India. While Lata cannot pinpoint the exact moment when she began feeling stifled by the dogma of praxis, she expresses chagrin and disgruntlement at being confronted with the intrusive and judgemental aspect of social relations in the receiving society:

"When elders are around, they have too much say in everything. Some things I notice now that didn't bother me when I used to live here – like if I tell my son to take his glass or dinner plate to the kitchen, they will say 'why are you asking him to do it? He is a boy'. We are Brahmins, and once the boy wears the sacred thread, then uska jhootha woh khud nahin uthaatha (he will not carry the plate he has eaten from - it must be done for him). But this dictum is only for the son, not the daughter. She has to do all her own work, and his too. Once my aunt told me bluntly – a girl has no identity of her own, she is part of the family that's all. This was too much for my daughter, she questioned me... and then it bothered me too".*

At first, Lata believed that her husband and she could remain flexible in their outlook even while they upheld their caste identity. They hoped that when they were alone with their children, they could relax the norms of culturally appropriate behaviour. This proved to be difficult. Lata found that she had to struggle to create an ambience for her family that would merge the cultural mores drawn from her archived memories of India with the values based on her lived experiences in Australia. Despite wanting to hold on to 'liberal' values, they felt pressured by familial and social expectations. They felt compelled to keep up appearances and perform culturally appropriate roles on social occasions that reinforced gendered power imbalances skewed in favour of patriarchy.

While a return migrant's Hindu identification can generate a set of cultural expectations of India, the rigid social hierarchies that arise at every turn can well diminish the lustre of those expectations, rendering the resettlement more difficult. When the reality of everyday life in the personal sphere fell short of Lata's expectations, even the presence of familiar rites and liturgy, and the cultural mores of her childhood did not ease the sense of discomfort she experienced with her Indian heritage. Gmelch observes that one of the main reasons why a returning migrant

finds it challenging to readjust to the society they were socialised in, is that they harbour unrealistic expectations of the homeland (1980). It came home to Lata that the cultural traditions that she had upheld fiercely, including her self-awareness of her upper-caste status, did not align with her acquired value-system that had developed alongside her emerging self-identity as a cosmopolitan and a global citizen. Eventually, these experiences laid the ground for internal conflict. After a while, both parents began to feel that the quest for immersion into authentic 'Indian culture' came at the cost of dissonance within the inner spaces of their family life.

Culture Clash in the Workplace

Lata's husband Amaresh found that he had a different set of problems to deal with. Amaresh was on an intra-company transfer and did not have to prove his credentials in order to secure a job. He also did not encounter language barriers in the workplace as English was the primary language of business communication. However, he expresses unhappiness with the work culture at his multinational firm in Bangalore:

"Corporate politics and lack of discipline! Also, thousands of young professionals who want to make big money quickly and get promoted quickly. It's a struggle to survive in India, no limit to working hours and you have to deal with a management that wants unrealistic results. The infrastructure is pathetic, poor water connections... We are still in the developmental phase - it will take another 2 decades for it to stabilise. The planning of government and bureaucracy is not aligned. The laws are there, the enforcement is zero. I found the work culture to be completely different from what I experienced in Australia."

Other studies on the experiences of migrant professionals returning to India have described the challenges that the returnees must navigate, including the over-emphasis on hierarchies, the disregard for fixed working hours, and 'petty disputes or unnecessary displays of power and control' (Bhatt, 2018, p.131). Upadhyaya's research on the exercise of power and agency in India's software outsourcing industry refers to the inflexible work model adopted by the management (2009). Another study reports on the wary attitudes of Indian employers towards America-returned Indian professionals, deeming them to be 'rich' and spoiled', who might quit shortly because of their inability to adjust to the Indian environment; extending the scepticism to wonder why they would choose to leave a far more materially rewarding life in the US to relocate to India (Jain, 2011, p.1318).

One of the participants in my study, Oliver Joseph, is a software engineer who moved back to India with his wife Rita and his two children after living and working in the US for over 13 years. He explains that the transition from the US to India was made easier because he was still working for the same US-based company. He does however recall it being a “*huge culture shock*” initially:

“The first month I would be at my desk at 8.30 am, but there would be nobody there. By 10 in the morning, some people would start drifting in... But the hardest thing to bear was what I call the ‘white man’s syndrome’ - that is if someone from the other side of the continent tells you to do something you will rush to do it. I had a team in the US, and a team in India – both teams reported to me. But if a program manager in the US asked for some feature to be added to a particular software program, and if I reviewed it and said no, we can’t do it, immediately others in the room would say ‘no, no ... how can we say no to this white guy?’ So, I’d say firmly, just tell him ‘we can’t do it’. But they’d protest ‘Oh, but he has asked for it’. I would say more forcefully, ‘Guys if you can’t do it, then I will tell him. You forget – Steven reports to me!’ But you could see them hesitating... Things are better now, but it has taken me a few years to get to this point!”

Though Oliver worked hard at establishing his authority and retaining the work style that he was used to at his previous workplace in the US, he found that he had to adapt to the Indian work environment - accepting the long hours of work and staying in touch with his boss at all times. His wife Rita found this aspect of life in India difficult to adjust to:

“Suddenly there was no concept of personal time. He would keep taking calls after he came back from the office, and that would continue until late in the night, and over the weekends! It took at least 4 years before he worked out the home-office balance. Sometimes it even made him think of migrating back to the US.”

Finding the Golden Mean between Expectation and Reality

The accounts of the returnees in this study indicate that they experience several emotions during the return migration process - expectation, anticipation, satisfaction, and equally, disappointment, frustration, and ambivalence. Potential returnees struggle with ‘uncertainties and distrust’ (Carling et al, 2015, p.10), perhaps because the idea of return is closely intertwined with feelings of belonging and identity. When they do return, the situation is not always tenable because returnees may find the reality to be below expectations, or they

could be disapproved of by the very society they were longing to return to, and they do not 'meet the community's and household's expectations' (Sabates- Wheeler et al, 2009 p.258).

Additionally, many of the female returnees find that their gender identity is constructed in ways that are contingent on how they reconcile the 'old' modes of contact comprising religious and cultural practices, and 'new' ones including educational processes and global exposure (Thapan, 2001, p.360). Indian feminist literature has consistently pointed to how gender identities are shaped by cultural, religious, and social values (Patel, 2014; Bagchi, 1995; Lateef, 1990; Ganesh, 1989). Values that uphold 'female passivity and submissiveness, and role-specific identities' result in 'gender asymmetry' (Thapan, 2015, p.361). Over time, Lata felt that India held little that could motivate her to continue living there, and that if her daughter continued to live in India, she would *"become like our female relatives, and behave in the way everyone expects her to"*.

A World Bank study of gender norms among men and women across 20 countries found that certain common traits associated with 'good wives' 'good husbands,' 'good girls,' and 'good boys', have remained largely unchanged across generations (World Bank, 2013). While patriarchy could be said to exist across different societies, in India it has remained for the most part, a rigid framework within which women must perform appropriate roles (Satyen, 2021). Lata was exposed to a more liberal outlook in Australia for over 16 years, including societal views on gender equality, gender-equal policies in the workplace, and women holding leadership roles (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Yet she was keen, like many other first generation Indian immigrant women, on protecting and maintaining their 'Indian identity' (Dasgupta, 1998) and remained influenced by the patriarchal norms of the society she had stayed in touch with transnationally (Walton- Roberts & Pratt, 2005).

This analysis of Lata's account does not intend to imply that all Indian immigrants will subscribe to a pattern of cleaving to the patriarchal mindset of the home society. Studying the experiences of immigrants and returnees like Lata Gollamudi seeks not to homogenise the Indian immigrant community worldwide; rather, it provides a window through which to comprehend how one's early socialisation and immersion in a distinct cultural ethos can shape gender identity in later life (Kallivayalil, 2004).

With the cultural landscape of Lata's memory now less attractive and realising that her childhood and college friends had also moved on, with many settling overseas, Lata began to rethink their decision to return to their home country. In the winter of 2019, Lata and Amaresh Gollamudi re-migrated to Australia, thus drawing to a close a closely fought inner battle to re-establish and reconnect with their roots in India. Amaresh's current employer is in the United States, and he chooses to commute from Australia to the US and back, while his family stays in Melbourne. In a telephonic interview from Melbourne, Amaresh expresses his relief at returning to Australia:

"We saved our children's futures – they will get the best of opportunities here. Life in Australia is better, the universities are better. Yes, the cultural values of India don't exist anywhere else, but that we are carrying with us. Now we have seen life closely in both countries. A lot of learning has taken place... the practical experience we have had - no theory can be a substitute for that. What is best for the next generation? Who knows? Mental peace sets in when you settle down wherever you have peace in your heart. But every day we still make comparisons between Australia and India. We are on our toes, what is best all round? It's all about balancing, there is a price for everything. One day maybe we'll come back..."

Lata elaborates further:

"India mein koi seedhi tarah se jaata nahin hai (nobody follows the straight path in India). Bargaining is there, people may cheat you. You have to fight for everything. I am walking across a road, and someone may throw garbage on the road in front of me - I was tolerating that, but for how long? I know there's a better life elsewhere. I decided to come here because I wanted to show Indian culture to my kids, and then I decided that I had done enough. They know their culture now."

Circumscribed Identities

The narratives of some of the other participants in this study also reveal the little everyday things that compel them to challenge circumscribed constructions of gendered identity. Rita Joseph, who runs a successful fitness business and a Gymnastics Academy for young learners in Bangalore, discovered that the coaches they hired to train the children were reluctant to work under her, or even discuss day-to-day problems with her. They would approach her husband Oliver to make decisions on her behalf, they would consult him before installing any new equipment, and ignore Rita's own inputs. Oliver recalls:

"They prefer talking to me because they feel that I am the man in the house and as such, my wife should take second position. I have tried explaining to them, even getting annoyed with them, but it's been over 5 years and even now, they will not grant her that respect."

Rita reasons it out:

"I kept telling myself - these workers and suppliers come from small towns and villages, so they can't accept a woman as a boss. So any decisions to do with purchases or installation, they will wait for Oliver to drop in and then rush over to ask him! They don't mind talking to me, but at the end, they want to hear from him. But I just have to keep asserting myself, and hopefully, they will come around."

Another participant in this study, Asha Hegde, who is an arts education researcher and practitioner, had worked in the US for over 20 years before choosing to return to India. Asha is driven by a desire to improve the standard of art education in the country and use it as a medium of education for under-privileged children. A single woman, she prefers to live alone in a flat in the city, and not with her parents, to retain her independence - a decision that has met with a great deal of disapproval from her own family members as well as her neighbours:

"Patriarchy is a big issue here. I live in a spacious building complex, in a comfortable flat. But every time I step out and go downstairs to my car, I can see the eyes on me. Even the security guard is disapproving, because he can't understand why a woman would be living by herself, and if she is, she must be an oddity. Once I had an issue with the water flow, and I went to the building manager, he had the audacity to tell me - 'ask your husband to contact me'. Then he changed it to 'or ask your father to talk to me' and just dismissed me. It was a shock. The fact that he would not engage with a woman on what was a simple infrastructural issue - that was baffling to me. Was it because I was a single woman? I felt like I didn't count."

Encountering sexist attitudes is part of the urban Indian professional woman's 'identity negotiations, straddling as they must the private and public spheres of 'home' and 'the world' (Lau, 2010, p.274). Over the last few decades of societal change, Indian cities have seen a significant rise in women working full-time in professional settings, with socially and economically privileged women being educated to graduate level at the very least, and pushing ahead to occupy responsible, highly paid jobs. Smitha Radhakrishnan, in her paper on transnational knowledge professionals and the 'New' India' suggests that 'these women are at the helm of key ideological transitions within the Indian middle class' (2007, p.144).

Even so, in her work on gender distinction within the IT space in Bangalore, Radhakrishnan also underlines the emergence of a social category of single independent women who are still subjected to gender inequality and patriarchal control (2011).

The near-hostile interaction between Asha and the security guard or the society secretary echoes what scholars have described as the 'one clear fact of Indian life: the unacceptability of the unmarried adult woman' (Stone and James, 1995, p.130). It reflects the continuing societal unease with the idea of selfhood and singlehood for women. A 2015 report by the National Forum for Single Women's Rights catalogues single women in 5 categories - widowed, never married (or remain single by choice and/or circumstance), separated, divorced, or abandoned (or cast off by their spouses). The report dwells extensively on the pitiable condition of single women and acknowledges the 'stigma of 'singleness' in the wake of a pervasive ideology of marriage and family' (p.3). As Fernandes states, 'single working women must contend with strong gendered ideologies that construct them as a potential threat to the social order' (2006, p.165).

Thus, women like Asha Hegde in my study, represent a challenge to the idealised notion of women 'firmly located within families' (Lamb, 2018, p.50) - an imaginary endorsed by a society which still views marriage as the 'the most important part of a girl's life' (Caplan, 1985, p.85). For Asha, such incidents served to remind her of her single status which she had never viewed in deficit terms previously while in the US:

"I keep thinking that I am 45 now, then when I am 55 or 60, and I still don't have my own family...what will happen in the long run? In the US, my friends were my family. It is about the mindset. In the US the conversation was about 'tell me about you, what do you do?' Here in India, I find it's about 'tell me about your family - what does your husband do?' Or 'how many children do you have, Madam?' And if you say you are single, they look away, look uncomfortable - they don't know what to make of you. I chose not to get married. But I find that a woman in India is defined by whether she has a husband and children; her other accomplishments pale in comparison to that! It has been disillusioning for me".

Gendered Spaces

"Things change when you return to India" says Rashmi Thomas who returned with her husband and children to India in 2006, after spending eleven years in the US and Japan. Rashmi found that the laid-back, unfussy edifice of their everyday family life which had included a fairly

spontaneous and casual approach to division of work between the family members at home, had altered. Once they settled into their daily routine inside a luxurious gated complex in Bangalore, and they began socialising with friends and relatives, the tenor of the interactions within the family and extended family began to change. Rashmi experienced a shift in expectations of task-sharing in the domestic sphere, which set the tone for not just a physical return to the city she had grown up in, but also a return to the social conventions of her childhood:

“I have noticed how my husband’s demeanour changes when his parents are around. He is reluctant to come and help me in the kitchen the way he did when we were overseas. A man is given a certain position in Indian society - for example, this idea that the man is not meant to go into the kitchen. Now, if my husband goes into the kitchen, my maid will say, ‘no, no Sir’...so he might protest mildly – ‘I just want to make something’, and she will protest, ‘No, no.’ So nowadays, he himself has become comfortable with the idea that women do housework, not men. He is sliding back into the same kind of role that he used to see his father in. His mother prefers her son to sit in the living room and wait for the food to come! Though to be fair, Joy is not comfortable with that.”

This study finds that it is in the period of resettlement into the home society that forgotten household rhythms are reactivated, and an uneven division of housework is once again legitimised. Thus, the domestic sphere becomes a potential site of conflict where the spouses must align ‘the contradictory discourses of traditional masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and gender equality on the other’ (Nyman et al, 2018, p.44). For Rashmi and Joy, the first few years after return migration were marked by the challenges of balancing gender ideology with gender equality.

Rashmi also realized that while she was glad to have hired help in India, she missed the intimacy of the two of them handling household chores together, the private togetherness they enjoyed whilst they were overseas:

“I think in terms of quality time we were better off there! I can see that my husband feels embarrassed to work in front of his mother, or to serve me a cup of tea, or clean up the house on a Sunday when our helper doesn’t come. But we behaved differently with each other when we were abroad. Also, here there is no concept of privacy, the cook can just barge into any room, the driver can interrupt our conversation when we are in the car, workmen peer in through the windows, and relatives feel free to drop in at any time.”

Rashmi points out that socialising with friends and relatives here in India is markedly different from the social gatherings that took place in the US:

“Back then, we had frequent get-togethers, and it was very natural for all of us to sit and talk together. Here, the men and women separate out after the actual meal. The men will group together and talk about work, investment, politics... the women will be talking about home, schools, maids. I have to remind myself that I have a degree from an Ivy League university, and that I can also hold my own with the men on the topics they are discussing. But I am expected to sit with the women, talk about domestic concerns, or at the most, some charitable project - that bothers me. Joy says that I’ve got it wrong, that it’s a question of space – in the US we had a smaller place so we would all hang out together, while here in Bangalore we have a huge bungalow, so people drift out to corners. But I know that’s not true. And after the party, it’s me telling the helper how to clean up, as if that is solely my job!”

Researchers have made note of the fact that migrants’ task sharing behaviour changes in keeping with changes in socio-cultural environments (Sakka et al, 1999). Often, in many societies, the division of household labour is shaped by the power dynamics between husband and wife, which in turn depends on which partner has more access to resources such as education, earnings, and occupational prestige. Individuals with more resources relative to their spouse or the labour market use these resources to ‘buy’ themselves out of housework (Pinto & Coltrane, 2013, p.45). Housework therefore is not neutral in character, and its allocation must be interpreted as a marker of cultural notions of gender relations (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; Ferree, 1990). The status of returning migrant women with regard to an equitable distribution of responsibilities and rights within the home need not lead to ‘modernization’ (Defigou and Koufakou, 1993; Day and Icduygu, 1997). Other studies have been more inconclusive, suggesting that return migrants could either adopt more ‘traditional’ gender roles or more ‘modern’ gender roles in the home society (Sakka et al, 1999), implying that gender role change is an ongoing process influenced by various factors such as the social and cultural mores of the society they return to.

Rashmi, who is as highly educated as her spouse, and had worked as a financial analyst in the US, feels that whilst they were overseas, they had enjoyed a more egalitarian relationship. This was reflected in their behaviour at home, and in their social interactions with friends and colleagues. Even though Joy was the main breadwinner, and Rashmi put her own career on hold in order to devote herself to the children, they saw each other as partners, and did not subscribe to set notions of gender roles. They shared childrearing and domestic responsibilities, and Rashmi

expressed satisfaction at playing a strong role as a homemaker, who was actively involved in decision-making for the family. After returning to India, Rashmi found that the decision-making process had expanded to incorporate the views of several extended family members, that her spaces of identity had shrunk to just 'wife' and 'mother' and 'daughter-in-law'. She felt that those categories did not do justice to her potential.

She has also been unable to expand the area of personal productivity to include a job outside the home, which might have allowed her to apply her skill-set and previous work experience in a field outside the domestic sphere:

"Age is definitely a stumbling block in India if you want to return to the corporate world. Even in the IT field, so many young IT graduates are coming out every year in India, the competition is intense. If you are a senior professional like my husband, then it's alright. He was offered an opportunity by his US-based venture capital firm to set up a branch office in Bangalore. Otherwise, you have to face ageism, especially women. In the US, I could have upgraded my skills and got back to working."

Rashmi and Joy continue to remain transnationally connected with their social network in the US. Their home in Bangalore retains some of the furniture and artefacts that they had brought back with them in 2006, and they point with pride to their *"family room where we hang out as a family"*, and the *"large open kitchen where we also eat, just like we did in the US."* They return to the US frequently for holidays, continue to Skype with their close friends in Japan, and in 2018, their older daughter left to pursue an undergraduate degree in California. Reflecting over their years spent overseas, and now back in India, Rashmi reflects on the advantages and disadvantages of return:

"I think the standard of living is better here in India - I have access to a better home, we are closer to our parents, and I have access to helpers. But the quality of life is far better abroad - in terms of infrastructure, in terms of traffic, even the air quality. Better classrooms for children and better career opportunities. The door is still open, we have travelled around so much that it will not be difficult for us to transplant ourselves again in some other country. All of us are still US citizens, that can open up a lot of opportunities. But on the whole, it's been good. We always wanted them to grow up with an extended family, because we ourselves come from big families, and we couldn't get that in the US."

Cultural Anchoring and the Travails of Parenting

The lack of tangible support structures in the receiving country, such as parents, and extended family members, who can provide emotional anchoring and advice on parenting, and can pass down knowledge to the next generation on familial and community practices, is perceived by many migrants as a big drawback to living in the host country. Shilpita is an artist who made the shift from her parental home in Delhi, leaving behind a large extended family and social network, in order to accompany her husband Dheeraj to California soon after their marriage in 1996. Over a ten-year cycle of migration, settlement, mobility and resettlement in various countries, Shilpita had to sustain her individual conception of the family model, which was built on the scaffolding of her own early lived experiences in India. Like many other Indian transnational wives, Shilpita stayed in close touch with her relatives in India and regularly took their advice on safeguarding her family's cultural and ethnic identity in the host society. She thus performed the social reproductive work considered essential to 'maintaining connections to India while creating homes abroad' (Bhatt, 2018, p.10).

The early years spent in the US represented a period of anxiety for Shilpita, as she found herself reluctant to bring up her children in a society that she could not relate to. The cultural norms regarding the raising of children in the US were not compatible with Shilpita's own normative vision of good parenting - a mental tableau she retained in her memory, of a sprawling joint family, with decisions taken in consultation with older members, care-giving responsibilities and interdependence:

"In the US, there is this big generation gap between parents and children, a constant tussle between Indian parents like me and their kids who are born and brought up there - a disconnect – it's not like how I was, and still am, with my parents. I felt that there is hardly any interaction in American families, they are too independent. But that's how American society is!"

Shilpita's essentializing of 'American' culture contradicts the existing environment of diversity in the United States in which there can be no singular American identity on offer. Her words therefore reflect her own subjective, perhaps judgemental viewpoint, yet these were feelings that she had to contend with, feelings that ultimately influenced her decision to return:

"Children are given hints about leaving home, to be on their own, even before they turn 18! I grew up in a joint family, my grandparents lived with us, there was so much sharing... good times and bad times spent together".

Shilpita had formed the view that American parents are in a sense, abandoning their children when they do not object to their children taking up part-time jobs while studying, or when they asked them to move out of the parental home; she, like many other Indian parents in the West, equated economic independence with emotional distance (Levitt, 2009, p.1232). She elaborates:

“Look at me - even at this age I still want that closeness with my parents, want to consult them... how hurt I would have felt if they had kept pushing me out when I was just a young girl.”

The desire to have the same kind of relationship with her children that she had once had with her own parents, reaffirms that the ‘families we live by’ remain a powerful force in shaping how we live our lives (Gillis, 1996). Her fear, that the children *“...will slip out of our hands if they live away from the family home, they will lose touch with our values, then what would our people back in India think?”* appears to reflect her apprehensions about the moral judgement passed by her community back ‘home’ and can be understood in the context of her need for belonging and cultural anchoring.

In 2006, Shilpita moved back to Bangalore, after Dheeraj took up a senior position at a global consulting firm, and their children were enrolled in an international school. Sitting in her private garden inside her gated complex in Bangalore today, Shilpita sometimes wonders whether they made the right choice. She recalls that her husband would have liked them to continue in the US, but that she persuaded her husband otherwise:

“I pushed my husband into returning to India. Home felt like home only after we came back. As an artist, I had a good learning curve in the US. But that didn’t matter because I didn’t belong there. Yes, my relatives are living there - they seem happy enough, but that’s because they have grown up in the US, their children belong there. I grew up in India, I do not think like an American. I didn’t even want my children to belong there, to be American! If we had continued in the US, being citizens would not have been enough. We would be expected to behave like those people, think like them, feel like them - only then would we be happy, only then would we really belong. And I felt I couldn’t do that.”

Several studies have underlined the concerns of Indian immigrant families over children embracing ‘American culture’, ranging from worry over losing parental authority to how children’s actions might bring about a ‘loss of face’ for the parents in the community (Varghese and Jenkins, 2009; Dugsin, 2001; Dasgupta, 1996). Another study on Punjabi Sikh parenting and

education in Britain underlines the anxiety that many in the community experience about whether their children will ‘bigher ja ve’ which translates into ‘go off the rails’ by their imbibing an excess of ‘outside culture’, thus becoming ‘too Westernized’ (Qureshi, 2014, p.214). The author elaborates on how peer cultures in British schools are also viewed as a force to be feared, which could undermine all the work invested by the parents in the ‘moral’ upbringing of their offspring as well as their sustained efforts at cultural reproduction such that the ‘transmission of core values of Punjabi Sikh culture—religion, mother tongue and familial spirit’ is not impaired in any way (ibid., p.214). Yet another study, on transnational Malayalee immigrant families who moved between Kerala, the UK, and Dubai, refers to how parents are often tempted to return to their home country simply because they would like their children to imbibe Indian culture and study at Indian schools to keep them ‘on track’; the authors conjecture that parents possibly have ‘a folk notion akin to habitus, a conviction that children are strongly formed by their surroundings’ (Osella and Osella, 2008, p. 147 as cited in Qureshi, 2014, p.215).

In my study, Shilpita’s concerns about her children becoming ‘American’ are echoed in the account of another couple in this study - Maria Koshy and her husband Stephen, who spent 12 years in the US, the greater part of which was spent in Rochester, near their workplace. Their residence was in an all-white neighbourhood, as was their daughter’s school, which made them feel isolated from their own cultural community. The lack of a strong Indian presence in their locality acted as a reminder that if they wanted their children to retain their Indian roots, they would have to return to India. Maria remembers that Stephen had shared his views on this even before they were married:

“I always knew we had to go back, because Stephen told me so even before we got engaged. I asked him about his future plans, and he said that he wanted to return to India in 10 years. And even his parents would keep telling my parents ‘Kochumon (his pet name) will return in 10 years, he just wants to see the world’. So, from the beginning both of us knew that it was about ‘make money, see the world, and come back’ to India”.

Stephen clarifies that the number 10 was tied to the idea that if they had a daughter, they would have to return immediately after she turned 10 years of age, because “...after she attained puberty there was the danger that she might start getting interested in boyfriends and all that, like all Americans, and I don’t want her to have fights with us over all that”.

Stephen's mention of 'fights' that might occur when his daughter grows up into a teenager is an example of what Inman, Ladany, Constantine, and Morano term 'cultural value conflict' (2001, p.18), that arises from having to meet the cultural expectations of the society of origin as well as the behavioural expectations imposed on the person in the receiving society (in this case, Anglo American culture). Upholding the honour of the family translates into respecting and obeying the elders in the family without question (Durvasula and Mylvaganam, 1994), and sexual purity in young Indian women is deemed essential for a successful arranged marriage which is the preferred cultural norm for maintaining family status (Kallivayalil 2004; Segal, 1998). Thus, the very concept of 'dating' is viewed with suspicion and becomes a key site of cultural value conflict (Varghese and Jenkins, 2009).

There was no way, Stephen said, that he would allow his daughter to pick up Western culture and "*go off-track*". As soon as Lisa was born, Stephen reminded Maria of his intention to take the family back to India before Lisa became 'Westernised'. Both parents worked at socialising their daughter in traditional gender roles. Over time, though Maria had begun to love her life in the US, and though she was holding a highly paid position at one of America's biggest hospitals, and was now reluctant to go back, she complied with her husband's wishes. Within a month after Lisa turned ten, they returned to the city of Bangalore in India, with their daughter and their second child, a son.

As Radhakrishnan puts it, 'central to the symbolic capital of the Indian family is the rejection of pre-marital sex, especially for women' (2009, p.206). The belief that sexual permissiveness is part of 'Western culture', and that girls, in particular, should not be given 'too much freedom' otherwise there could be a degrading of Indian family values, is a recurring theme amongst Indian immigrant families, when they consider returning to India. Girls who stray from prescribed gender behaviour risk injuring the family reputation (Khandelwal, 2002). Therefore, it becomes a priority for the Indian immigrant – to avert such a disaster that can bring 'shame' to the family.

Maria made sure that all four members of the family acquired American citizenship before they left the US: "*See, I felt that the kids should not struggle later, what if Lisa wants to study abroad one day*". However, Stephen reiterates his stance:

"Not until she is married to someone from our community in India, then she can go and do what she likes with his permission. Alone, she can't go abroad, I will not allow that...only after marriage. If you look at Americans, their personal

lives are in a mess, so many divorces... and it's all perfectly acceptable in the US. So, I was telling my wife - it's good we came back. At least we are giving the children some Indian values. Even if we had tried to give them Indian values in the US, still, their friends are all American, the culture is American. It's hard to force things on kids when you are there. That's why at least their formative years should be spent in India".

Stephen's views support the findings of other studies on the Indian diaspora that show that though they might desire and pursue an American consumerist lifestyle, they remain conservative in matters of marriage and religion (Lal, 2003; Mathew and Prashad, 2000). Many NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) view India as the source of an 'authentic' culture and believe that return to India offers the opportunity to safeguard 'cultural and family values liable to be degraded outside India' - the perception that living 'abroad' opens up the dangerous path to promiscuity is at the core of conceptualization of the 'respectable Indian family' (Radhakrishnan, 2008, p.10).

While Maria does not seem comfortable with her husband's stance, she offers 'co parenting support' (Cabrera et al, 2013), by actively facilitating and reinforcing her partner's parenting goals:

"My husband is not alone in thinking like this - we know many other Indian Americans who are afraid of their daughters going astray...falling in love with some white man, or worse, living with someone before marriage. See, that would be a shock to everybody back home in India, it is not in our culture to do all that".

After returning to India, Maria has stayed in touch with the Indian families in the US with whom they had shared a strong bond, as well as her old professional network:

"It might happen that we go back one day, at least to visit our children, who I think will go for their higher studies to the US. We could even get work, for we are still US citizens. I miss a lot of things that we had there, especially materially. We could send money back to our parents and siblings in India, we had a very comfortable life there. But it's alright, now we have adjusted to life here. The future, who knows."

Stephen reflects on his decision:

"We were in the US for 12 years, but we missed the support of our family terribly. If you are not well, or you are worried about something there is no one to talk it out with. We came back because we know our parents are here, and they will always be there for us. In the US, we had friends, but I can't expect my

friends to be there for me beyond a limit. In India we can depend on our parents, relatives, our old classmates - I trust them completely. In fact, I am now in a business partnership with my brother and an old school friend. There is nothing like being with family”.

Stephen’s words provide an insight into the return migrant’s dependence on interpersonal social networks wherein norms of trust, obligation and reciprocity are established and work in mutually beneficial ways (Portes, 1995; Light and Gold, 2000; Marger, 2001). The couple later moved to Kerala from Bangalore, propelled by Stephen’s desire to take the family back quite literally to its roots, by building a house in the very compound of their ancestral house where his parents had lived since their marriage. Both Maria and Stephen had grown up in Kerala, but for Stephen more than Maria, it was the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream to return and reclaim a culture that made him feel emotionally secure.

Conclusion:

This chapter underscores the link between a cooperative and welcoming home society, and a positive return migration experience, thus addressing a gap in migration literature. It makes the case that the degree of welcome accorded to the returnees by family and community can influence their decision to settle or emigrate again. Sifting through the returnees’ narratives of resettlement, I focus on the role of expectations in the post-return migration period. Here ‘narrative’ is understood as a site wherein the narrator employs structure and agency to construct his social world (Sandhu, 2018, p.61). I note that the ability of returnees to adapt to their situation in the face of those expectations being fulfilled, dampened, or re-negotiated, can impact the quality of resettlement, and shape their future life-course. Thus, the study highlights the importance of interpersonal networks such as the family in migration decision-making, and points to how the success of the return migration project hinges greatly on the ways in which returnees balance expectation and reality.

For most of the participants in this study, the desire to offer authentic cultural resources to their offspring was one of the chief motivations for returning to India and immersing themselves in ‘Indian culture’ with renewed vigour. As an elite, educationally advantaged and globally networked Indian, Lata could relate to the community of ‘global’ Indians who seek to be non-traditional and secular in outlook, yet long to reclaim their roots. However, her self-identity as a returnee to her homeland with the self-imposed goal of reclaiming her authentic ‘Indian’ cultural

roots, thus consolidating her position within the family as its cultural custodian, created a state of inner turmoil. She found it difficult to walk the fine line between accommodating the restrictive gendered demands of upper middle-class respectability in India and allowing herself and her children the latitude they were accustomed to in Australia. The disparity between their romanticised idea of the homeland and their lived reality led both husband and wife to scale down their expectations of their homeland. However, the lowered level of expectation-fulfilment did not help them overcome their misgivings about their return to India. Over time, the success of their return migration became contingent on the expectations-to-experience achievement ratio (Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2009).

Reflecting how 'power is complex and contextual' (Ladegaard and Phipps, 2020, p.74), many women face the additional burden of living up to patriarchal expectations when they return to India, where the family is often the ground on which the heterosexual patriarchal ideal is nurtured and sustained (Thappan, 2001, p.359). Rashmi experienced a shift in expectations of task-sharing in the domestic sphere, and a straitjacketing of gender roles for both partners. Her sense of dissatisfaction at the narrowing of her self-perceived identity has led her to question the social and cultural mores of the society they have returned to.

Shilpita on the other hand, actively desired a return to the old cultural norms with regard to the upbringing of her children, and her anxieties over 'belonging' and 'home' motivated her decision to return to India to renew familial ties that held the promise of emotional and cultural anchoring.

While Maria is ambivalent about the resettlement into India being a permanent one, she did offer 'co parenting support' (Cabrera et al, 2013), by actively facilitating and reinforcing her partner's parenting goals. Fearful of their daughter 'going astray' and setting down on the path to promiscuity in a Western society, the family turned homeward in search of 'Indian values', and the familial network that promised emotional support.

The accounts in this study suggest that membership in social networks provides vital support to migrants in both host and home contexts. This support is particularly useful in the context of return migration. Equally, the ability of the migrant to have a positive return experience depends largely on their reception by family, community, and society, the social networks built and accessed, and the prior information flows between the individual and the sending community (Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2009).

Yet, the challenges of resettlement often create a wellspring of uncertainty for the returnees. Not only must they fob off scepticism about their return migration project and the intentions that sparked the journey 'home', but they must also navigate the possible mismatch between imaginaries of the homeland and the 'real' India, while crafting suitable responses to the rhetorical question – *'Aap aaye hi kyon? But why did you come back in the first place?'*

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Liminal Return

"It was like, I understood the US, but it was not baked into me. It didn't come from within. It was not knowledge that was rooted in my bones. Whereas India - it is baked into my soul, I understand this place. They know me here."

- Ameera Ali, Bangalore

This thesis has aimed to address a gap in migration literature by focusing on the phenomenon of return migration, and specifically, return migration to India and resettlement in the home society thereafter. Viewing elite, highly skilled migration as a site upon which textured renditions of identity are articulated, it examines the returnees' notions of 'home' and 'belonging' at the intersection of mobility and identity. This research has employed the term 'highly skilled migrants' to refer to those with tertiary education or equivalent work experience (Iredale, 2001). The participants in this study are professionals hailing from the fields of software, finance, and business; equipped with a high degree of economic and social capital, they enjoy relative ease of access to global professional networks. Through the many years spent as transmigrants and settlers in the receiving societies, they have nurtured an ideal of 'home' and the possibility of return. Intense preparation and planning preceded the journey back to India, where they hoped to reclaim remembered spaces of belonging.

Accordingly, I have foregrounded the narratives of these highly skilled returnees who must rescript a sense of self and reconcile past memory with the lived spatial and emotional reality of the present. Narratives are a crucial tool in the hands of the returnees for their own self-reflexivity, to make sense of their autobiographies (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Linde, 1993; McAdams, 1996). In the mix of emotions that drive the return migration process, the desire to reconnect with one's roots is the ascendant note. When Ameera says, *'they know who I am'*, it reflects her need to establish an identity that is not just evident but accepted by the community. She needs to 'be' the person she is, and she also needs to have it affirmed by others. In the congruence of 'being' and 'being seen' lies her sense of self- actualisation.

Much of 'return migration' scholarship has approached the theme of return from the perspective of 'homeland orientation' (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997). Other 'push' factors attributed to return migration include restrictive immigration policies in the Global North (Tejada, 2013), and ethnic discrimination in the receiving society that can spark economically motivated return migration (Tsuda, 2013). However, this study has found that mobility for migrant professionals is about opportunity and identity, rather than the mere pursuit of lifestyle aspirations. The accounts of the returnees in this research reveal that they were influenced by their community's strong transnational connections (Sahay, 2009), while also being 'pulled' by a sense of filial duty towards one's parents, and the urge to provide 'Indian' cultural resources to their offspring. Return migration was undertaken in order to pursue familial and cultural goals, deemed to be more important than monetary or career advancement. This finding reflects existing literature showing similar patterns of return motivations (Constant and Massey, 2003).

In this concluding chapter, I re-summarise the rationale for this research study, and circle back to the research questions that underpin the work and how they have been addressed in the data analysis. I then sum up key insights and findings, reflect on the limitations of the study, and point to the conceptual implications and contributions of the study. I also outline a few potential pathways of research that could be adopted in the future.

A Lacuna in the Literature

As I have stated in the introduction to this thesis, return migration as an area of scholarly enquiry has largely been given short shrift in comparison to other dominant threads in migration research such as 'emigration, immigration, assimilation, multiculturalism, diaspora, and latterly, transnationalism and globalisation' (Steffanson, 2004, p.48). Despite the lack of scholarly attention, many return migration processes are being carried out in different parts of the globe, including a nascent yet growing stream of highly skilled returning migrants to India.

At the outset, my endeavour was to examine the push-pull factors of return migration to India, contextualised within the milieu of increased mobility, globalisation, and transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009). Returnees are located within the global community of highly skilled professionals, working primarily in IT or finance - managerial or professional elites pursuing a form of 'privileged migration' (Fechter, 2007). As I probed their accounts, I became convinced that their experiences of resettlement into the homeland offered greater opportunity to

understand the factors that might influence their decision to settle back into the homeland for good, or to leave once again, thereby transforming the process of return migration into circular migration.

Dual Belonging and Transnational Identity

Poised between remembering and forgetting, straddling real and imagined worlds, their simultaneous articulation of their global, national, and transnational identities can be viewed from the lens of ‘simultaneity’ (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004). Their experiences of simultaneous belonging run through this thesis like a connecting thread. Being part of the old and familiar even while one is part of the new. A synchrony of existence wherein layers of identity overlap and co-exist. Accordingly, in this thesis, I have drawn on the conceptual framework of simultaneity which highlights notions of dual belonging held by migrants, as well as the interconnectedness of transnational practices (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004).

I have also employed a transnational lens while analysing the narratives of my participants in order to understand the key variables that could influence the phenomenon of return migration, as well as impact the outcome of return. The interpersonal social ties that migrants maintain across vast geographical distances play a significant role in their migration decisions and illustrates how a diaspora can be held together by a ‘shared imagination’ (Cohen, 1996). Thus, I have engaged with the literature on transnationalism at various points in my empirical chapters to understand how transnational bonds transcend territorial boundaries. The focus on transnational families contributes to our understanding of the ways in which migrants maintain corporeal cross-connection, as also their ‘ways of being’ (Levitt, Glick Schiller 2004) that constitute ‘emotional attachments, identity construction processes, and negotiating belonging’ (Bell and Erdal, 2015, p.79).

Listening, Gathering, Interpreting

As the chapter on Research Methodology sets out in detail, this study has adopted a qualitative approach in both data collection and analysis and applied an interpretivist perspective to ‘grasp the subjective meaning of social action’ (Bryman, 2012, p.30). The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of return migration, in the specific context of India.

Accordingly, the path of inquiry ranged over the motivations of return migration, and the 'transnational habitus' (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018) which facilitated the nurturing of the dream of return, and eventually, enabled it to be fulfilled. I then moved on to examine their narratives of resettlement into the home society, and engaged closely with the returnees' accounts of their life-worlds and the manner in which they interpret it.

The aim was to trace their migration trajectory back to the point when it all began, the life course that followed whilst living the lives of hypermobile migrant professionals travelling perhaps to more than one country across the globe, families in tow, all the while navigating challenges of contingency and precarity, integration and difference, inclusion, and exclusion. In the post-return setting, I examined the diverse processes and practices adopted by the returnees to help them feel comfortable and 'at home' in their country of origin, and the social networks that they engaged with, for the purpose of generating a 'locally conditioned identity' (Hannerz, 1996) - all of which fed into the returnee's identity project.

The chosen site of study was the city of Bangalore in South India, hailed variously as 'a beacon of the globalising world' (Sudheera, 2008, p.137), and as the 'Silicon Valley of India' (Heitzman, 2003, p.57) in recognition of its importance as global IT hub and as the city of choice of highly skilled transnationals (Chacko, 2007). In-person interviews were carried out in two to three sessions at their homes and other personal spaces inside the luxurious setting of gated complexes that have mushroomed in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad to cater to elite returnees. In view of the pandemic, the follow-up interviews were conducted virtually - a last round of interaction with the participants in the study, to fill gaps in the data gathered previously, and to allow for fresh insights into their own projections for the future which might entail plans to settle in the home country or preparations to remigrate. Subsequently, I resorted to thematic analysis of interview transcripts, and used open coding to illuminate emerging themes and concepts.

The long hours spent in qualitative fieldwork with the participants were fruitful in gathering a bricolage of conceptual notions, and the goals nurtured by this group of returning migrants. I considered the everyday structural challenges they had to negotiate in their home society, the burden of cultural expectations they had to bear, and sometimes reject, and the degree of welcome accorded to them by their extended family members that would prove to be a dominant influence on their migration decision-making in the future. What was it like to return to their country of origin, reconnect with extended family members, and community? How did they respond to the grinding inequalities on display in a country where much had remained the same,

though much had changed? How did they readjust to the work culture, what felt strange and what chords of memory were stirred? Importantly, would they stay on, or would they move again? The research focus was narrowed down to one key area - the returning migrant's self-perception of identity, and his or her related notions of home and belonging. Thus, I arrived at the overarching research questions underpinning this study:

1. What is the impact of mobility on identity for first-generation, highly skilled Indian transmigrants in both the receiving country and country of origin post return? How does the conceptual imaginary of 'home' translate into migrant homemaking? How do transnational migrants grapple with the experience of simultaneous belonging?
2. How are notions of 'home' and 'belonging' understood within the setting of gated communities? To what extent do gated communities in India reinforce lines of separation and stratification in society?
3. How do female trailing spouses navigate the challenges of uprooting and resettling across the migration trajectories of their mobile partners? What role does gender ideology play in migration decision-making and resettlement into the home society?
4. What does return translate into, for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? How does the behaviour of the home society influence the process of resettlement? Does return migration of the Indian diaspora mark the end of a cycle, or does circular migration follow?

I now turn to how these research objectives are addressed in the empirical chapters and share the insights and key findings that have emerged in the analysis.

Research Question Set 1:

What is the impact of mobility on identity for first generation, highly skilled transmigrants in both receiving country, and country of origin post return? How does the conceptual imaginary of 'home' translate into migrant homemaking? How do transnational migrants grapple with the experience of simultaneous belonging?

This research parses the narratives of the returnees to find that almost all of them have experienced simultaneous belonging to both receiving and home countries. It reaffirms that

migrants maintain kinship networks that stretch back and forth between home and host countries, thus constructing transnational identities for themselves. The study takes note of the hybrid identity that many transmigrants and their children develop and nurture, which is derived from both the receiving society and the ethnic-origin society. The term 'hybrid' must be understood as representing the 'notion of in-betweenness', implying a blurring of boundaries (Ang in Zournazi, 1998, p.160). However, as this chapter points out, it could well transpire in later life that the offspring of first-generation immigrants shed the transnational aspect of their identities once they attain adulthood. They might also privilege one identity over another depending on the circumstances. Chapter 4: 'The Identity Project - Dual Belonging and the unfixedness of 'Home'', helps extend the literature on identity and belonging; it explores the participants' sense of not quite belonging fully to either place, or what can be understood as synchronous belonging.

All through the years of working and living in the receiving country, they stayed strongly connected to their family and social networks in the home country. The way they constructed their social and cultural lives whilst in the receiving society reflects the 'transnational habitus' (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018) that both parents and children inhabited, which shaped new ways of doing family, and has implications for identity development. A transnational habitus builds on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of habitus to describe 'a structured set of values, ways of thinking and 'being' within the family, built up over time through family socialisation, practices and cultural traditions that transcend national boundaries' (ibid., 2018, p.418). It might involve, as in the case of the current participants, balancing the cultural expectations of their home society and extended family with the need to observe the cultural norms of the receiving society.

This study finds that acts of cultural reproduction in the receiving society, such as ritualistic immersion of the family deity in the local river in the receiving country, and frequent visits to the local Indian place of worship, actively facilitate the creation of spaces of identity and cultural belonging for transmigrants. Participants in this study like Lata, Amaresh, Maya, Shilpita, and many others, signed up for innumerable Indian cultural events for expat communities, and ensured that they made at least one annual trip back to India. This was in addition to the frequent virtual celebrations of festive occasions with family and extended family members. These findings strengthen the idea that while in the receiving society, immigrants actively seek channels for

self-identification, and that both social and cultural capital can be utilised as ‘tools for self-actualization’ (Kou and Bailey, 2014, p.114).

A term that kept surfacing in the accounts of the returnees was ‘Indian culture’ - an amorphous problematic term for it can be applied to many things. Whilst in the receiving society, migrants like Lata, Uma, and Shilpita who belong to the majority Hindu community, felt compelled to draw on their own cultural upbringing, and keep alive certain aspects of their Indian identity. This included speaking in the native language, classical music, and dance lessons for the children, sending remittances to the family in the home society, paying respect to elders in the extended family, and upholding the norms of social hierarchy. Taken together, these results suggest that the desire for a stable cultural identity spurs Indian immigrants to inculcate in their children an appreciation of their homeland culture. This supports the findings of other scholars like Radhakrishnan, who also states that conceptions of ‘Indian culture’ are often bracketed with a host of Hindu religious practices; these conceptions are further whittled down to a manageable set of practices through a ‘cultural streamlining process’ (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.5).

This would allow them the freedom to practise a ‘situational ethnicity’ (Paden, 1970, p.268) wherein an individual might access and flaunt the identity that seems contextually appropriate at that time. In this manner, migrant professionals create cultural meanings for themselves, which coalesce with their self-perceptions of identity.

For most diasporic migrants, turning the lens inward on the cloisters of memory makes materiality irrelevant, especially when they are located within a transnational habitus with an extraordinary degree of access to digital channels of communication. While the absence of physical presence may still be keenly felt, digital connectivity does generate a semblance of togetherness and belonging (Kedra, 2021) and actualizes familyhood. As John Urry describes it: ‘there is (more or less) instantaneity and simultaneity. In cyber places it is possible to sense the other, almost to dwell with the other’ (2002, p.266). It even becomes possible to ‘deintensify emotional interaction’ (King-O’Riain, 2014, p.257) by creating virtual co-presence as some of the accounts demonstrate.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that home can be experienced to a high degree of satisfaction through the virtual dimension. The continuous circulation of ideas and values within the social networks accessed virtually by the immigrant family builds

knowledge about the homeland community and strengthens the desire to return. Thus, transmigrants negotiate feelings of simultaneous belonging and practise migrant homemaking. However, many migrants acknowledge that virtual contact cannot be an adequate substitute for physical co-presence, which acts as a powerful force in their lives (Baldassar, 2001; Baldassar et al., 2006). In the context of migration and longings for 'home', this need for embodied connection and thick co-presence acquires an urgency that becomes a driver of return migration. Thus, the idea of return migration was continuously nurtured by all the participants, and in time, after a lengthy period of preparation, they actualized their dream of return.

The imaginary of 'home' that the migrants returned to transcended 'the brick and mortar of their own physical home to the larger canvas of a 'New India'' (Upadhyay, 2013, p.204)- an abstraction that aligns with the new, cosmopolitan image of the city of Bangalore, also designated as India's Silicon Valley. Bangalore, closely followed by Hyderabad, are the favoured cities to return to for the Indian highly skilled immigrant - both are tech hubs hosting the headquarters of several international software entities, besides multinational companies, and premier R & D laboratories.

Conscious that a great deal of planning is invested in the return migration process, and that preparations might well begin a few years before the actual return, builders and property developers have been building new townships and upscale gated complexes for wealthy returnees over the last 15 years. This exercise has reshaped urban space in these cities, and not always with optimal consequences for the city as a whole. The Bangalore skyline has seen a sprawl of hoardings extolling the virtues of 'couture communities' (Outlook, 2008, quoted in Chacko and Varghese, 2009), and 'exclusive and stylish' villas that promise a 'highly cosmo' ambience celebrating 'American Independence Day and Thanksgiving with as much zeal as the Hindu festivals Holi or Diwali' (Bal et al, 2017, p.18). The exclusivity factor is what appears to hold the strongest appeal for this expanding group of returnees.

Chapter 5 titled 'Gated Communities: Living in a Bubble' deconstructs their experiences of resettlement contextualised within the gated community setting. It examines the returnees' attempts to put down roots again while paradoxically displaying a reluctance to leave the comfort of their bubble-like existence inside gated enclaves.

Research Question Set 2:

How are notions of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ understood within the setting of gated communities? To what extent do gated communities in India reinforce lines of separation and stratification in society?

As more than one returnee in this study reveals, what they desired was to be with people ‘like’ themselves, and live in surroundings that recreate the familiar, previously lived spaces in the receiving society. Continuity is deemed important, both in terms of lifestyle, and community. This research shows that most returnees to Bangalore tend to gravitate towards luxurious gated complexes or elite apartment complexes with high-end amenities, sprawling tennis courts and open spaces that ‘marry the best of Indian and Western architecture’ (Chacko, 2007, p.138). Living in a GC provides the returnees with both status and privilege, besides an opportunity to be at home with people they can identify with - a community that has thrived on global exposure and has had similar migration trajectories. The members of a GC draw close together because they hold a similar amount and composition of different forms of capital (Pinxten and Lievens, 2014). Their everyday labour inside the gated complex includes place identity construction alongside the development of a community identity (Chacko and Varghese, 2009).

Within this habitat, the inhabitants practise similar ‘ways of being’ (Bell and Erdal, 2015) that mark them as different from the locals. Drawing close together for both emotional and practical support, they find themselves experiencing a kinship born out of solidarity. Here, I have drawn on Oosterlynck’s work on solidarity that develops in the ‘spatio-temporal register of everyday place-based practices’ (2016, p.765) to point to how everyday interdependencies underpin the solidarity that springs up between the members of the gated community. The narratives in Chapter 5 titled ‘Gated Communities: Living in a Bubble’ bear testimony to how the gated community can become a spatial expression of identity and belonging. The sharing of privatised civic resources, the patronising of their own luxurious high-end Club situated within their premises, the sprawling villas with gardens, the children cycling by or gliding along on rollerblades, and the acres of open spaces marked off for strictly private use manned by security guards - all of it merges to create a distinctive sphere of comfort, and most of all, privilege.

These dual processes of ‘class-making and place-making’ (Upadhya, 2013, p.151) can also be understood as the tools employed to construct a safe house for their identity project. Ensconced

within the secure confines of the gated estate, the inhabitant steers clear of the cacophony outside the imposing gates. Self-identity is drawn from the fount of social status and solidarity that work in unison to construct an almost autonomous cosmos, shut away from the local environment. Nevertheless, the act of separation from the world outside their gates does not diminish their sense of belonging to the homeland. Vocal about being ‘home at last’, most of the returnees have approached the task of resettlement with enthusiasm, renewing their connections with extended family, celebrating festivals along with the other gated community members, appointing a great many domestic helpers, and availing of most of the rights due to Indian citizens by virtue of being OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) cardholders.

Functioning as ‘pockets of prosperity and islands of well-being’ (Nayyar, 2012: xii), gated communities in Bangalore are nevertheless sites of exclusionary practices. These findings resonate with other studies on gated complexes (Atkinson and Blandy, 2013; Caldeira, 1996; Coy and Pöhler, 2002), where social distancing can co-exist with social interaction and integration. Characterised by within-group similarity and between-group dissimilarity, the gated communities in this study actively nurture spatial and affective distance between the groups inside and outside the gates of the complex, even though in reality, both groups may live in geographical proximity to each other. Thus, while gated complexes function as ‘sites of mobility convergence’ where the local, regional, national, and transnational forms of migration merge, the interwoven social fields of the employer and the employed become a setting where entrenched inequalities are normalized and systems of discrimination are inherent in everyday interaction (Bal et al, 2017, p.16).

While members of the gated community in this study speak at length about the perquisites of the job that they are offering their employees, their interactions with them on an everyday basis reflect varying degrees of class consciousness. The gated complex itself seems to normalise the act of maintaining binaries of social difference. For instance, domestic employees are forbidden to walk on the lawns of the GC clubhouse, or even loiter near the wrought-iron gates, and car park. They are encouraged to ‘keep their hair combed, come in clean and simple clothes’ while drivers are encouraged ‘not to grease their hair with excess oil (the car will smell)’ (Soofi, 2011).

Additionally, all employees serving residents of gated communities must consent to have their bags checked every single day when they enter or leave the premises. While domestic helpers work in intimate spaces within the houses, they are often denied the use of lifts, and relaxation in the various green spaces that dot the complex. Entry into the clubhouse is permitted if it involves collecting meals ordered by the people they work for. They might be the unlikely channel through which the children of the employers are exposed to the local dialect or cultural motifs, thus playing a significant role in advancing the parental agenda of 'socialising their children in Indian culture' (Bal, 2017, p.15), yet their position in the household and community remains a tenuous one. These findings indicate that domestic workers inside gated complexes occupy spaces of precarity and are bound in an intrinsically 'unequal interdependence' (Ray and Qayum, 2009) with their employers.

The act of excluding the 'other' begins from the moment gated enclaves privatise the public space, denying the local populace the right to access what are essentially community resources (Gonzalez, 2000; Webster, 2002). Life beyond the imposing gates of the complex is kept at a safe distance, lest the children or other family members get exposed to the 'dangerous' or disturbing sights of India that includes stark inequality, grime, or poverty.

When Priya states clearly that it is not that she is unaware of structural inequalities but can see no other option but to live inside a gated community if she has to make her resettlement into India a success, her words also capture the liminal mental space she occupies. There is a giving in, and a holding back, which reflects her sense of conflicted belonging. These insights into the returnees' resettlement experiences have significant implications for the understanding of how living in segregated and barricaded places like a gated complex simultaneously enables a delinking from the everyday reality of India, producing tiers of separation that harden and clot.

Even as the passage of years eases the task of resettlement into the home society, most of the returnees have ensured that personal and professional networks in the previous receiving society are kept alive. Like most highly skilled returnees the world over who continue to be highly mobile and transnational (Searle, 2016) these returnees admit that they make every effort to remain highly mobile and open to opportunity, regardless of the challenges of having to uproot themselves once again. A significant finding of this research is that the female migrants play a crucial role in migration decision-making and ease of settlement into both receiving and home

societies. They have invested considerable time and emotional labour into nurturing kinship networks and maintaining transnational connections across borders. Some of the female returnees have held responsible positions in the society they lived in prior to returning to India, while others relinquished their steady jobs and chose to be trailing spouses, for reasons both cultural and economic.

Chapter 6 titled 'Trailing Spouses: Tales of Agency and Resilience' explores their narratives of precarity and resilience.

Research Question Set 3:

How do female trailing spouses navigate the challenges of uprooting and resettling across the migration trajectories of their mobile partners? What role does gender ideology play in migration decision-making and resettlement into the home society?

Global relocation is not an easy process, either logistically or emotionally, especially when they move as a family. The migrant professional must view new global work territory as an opportunity to not just advance one's career, but to further embellish one's self-identity. There are gains at hand but also the burden of change, perhaps borne in larger measure by the 'trailing spouse' - a term that describes the spouse or individual following in the tracks of or accompanying their partner who is an internationally mobile professional (Cangi`a, 2017; Callan and Ardener, 1984; Walsh, 2007).

As Chapter 6 points out, the migration experience, when understood to be part of the life course strategy of a migrant from the Global South, is shaped by both cultural norms and familial expectations (Jarvis, 1999; Komter, 1985). Gender role ideology informs many migration decisions - a set of mores that shape societal expectations of gender behaviour. For instance, it is expected that a woman's family responsibilities must far outweigh her professional responsibilities, with the reverse holding true for men (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Participants in this study like Shilpita, Maria, Lata, and many others do not seem to entirely reject the patriarchal culture that has been part of their early upbringing. Their accounts underscore the patrilocality in the Indian family system which reinforces the centrality of male decision-making (Kou et al, 2017), building on age-old systems of patrilocal residence and patrilineal succession (Seymour, 1995). This results in a gendered allocation of household work, childcare, and paid work duties, primarily because of

the patriarchal belief that men's paid work is more fundamental to the family's and to men's identity (Branden, 2014, p.952).

However, the findings of this study shed new light on how female migrants can mould the circumstances they find themselves in to actualise their own aspirations. Most were active negotiators in the migration process and developed various coping strategies to deal with their situation. The willingness to relocate and adjust to changing life situations is also one kind of coping strategy. More importantly, her emotional support and cooperation would be critical to rendering the migration a success and would have a considerable impact on the male working spouse's own efforts at adapting to his new responsibilities. This research argues therefore, that it would be inaccurate to settle for a stereotyped portrayal of a passive spouse devoid of agency. On the contrary, their chronicles of settlement and resettlement reveal examples of problem-solving initiatives, resourcefulness in making the best of situations, and a degree of self-reflexivity that comes to the fore in changing cultural climates.

Moving away from the tendency to focus on the 'plight' of the trailing spouse, this research directs attention to how she seeks to be a supportive partner in the migration process. Despite the precarity and instability of professional identity that periodic relocation brought in its wake, many female migrants in this study took the initiative to build social networks in the receiving country, establish a social identity for their families by enrolling in club activities, and reached out to fellow expatriates and other mothers at their children's schools to create avenues of belonging. They cared for their immediate families, and simultaneously engaged in caregiving for extended family members across vast distances.

Rashmi worked at maintaining 'balance' in her life, juggling personal achievement with the interests of her family. Though she finally gave up her career so that her husband could pursue his own professional advancement, she states that she is content with her choice, and is emphatic about rejecting the term 'trailing spouse' as "*denigratory*". More than one female migrant in this study has eschewed the term 'trailing spouse' as being unjust as it does not do justice to their ability to decide what is best for them. When Shilpita exclaims, "*No, no. I never blindly followed my husband. If I had said no, we would not have moved. For me the only criteria was - 'is this going to be good for him professionally'*", it echoes both her self-esteem and pragmatism.

These qualities were considerably tested after they returned to India. Rashmi, for instance, discovered to her dismay that there was a shift in expectations of task-sharing in the domestic sphere, and a return to a fixity of gender roles for both partners. Her sense of dissatisfaction at the narrowing of her self-perceived identity led her to question the social and cultural mores of the society they have returned to - *“Why is it odd for my husband to help me in the kitchen? My mother says - ‘but you grew up here, you know how things are’.”* However, Rashmi states that she has come to accept the changed social and familial setting and is willing to work within the system. She resorts to the idea of ‘balance’ as a coping strategy that restores stability within the interiority of family life. It allows her to work within a self-imposed moral canvas aligned with a form of ‘respectable femininity, a critical symbolic performance’ (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p.147).

It is also true that the male returnees have their own set of challenges navigating structural constraints like a lack of adherence to deadlines, frustrating traffic snarls, delays in obtaining government approvals and the like. In Bhatt’s study of Indian IT professionals moving between the United States and India (2018), male returnees are reported to be having difficulties in adjusting, both to power hierarchies in the Indian workplace, as well as to the changing nature of gender roles as played out in the home setting.

In my own study, male returnees like Amaresh Gollamudi and Ben Thomas have shared their unhappiness with the lack of autonomy and the general work culture in Bangalore, finding it difficult to adjust to *“the corporate politics and lack of discipline”*. The corruption that returning migrants encounter in their home country at various stages of their resettlement, can also act as a barrier to feelings of well-being (Carling et al., 2015; Erdal, 2015). Nagesh Alluri found that he had to accept a degree of ‘compromise’ when it came to obtaining bureaucratic approvals for his entrepreneurial venture, which included making payments without official receipts. On another note, both Ebbie and Ben complained about a skewed work-life balance, besides having to navigate the confrontational behaviour of their team members who resented having to report to ‘foreign-returned’ Indian managers.

The female migrants have shared their difficulties in harmonising employment and family life. Though most of the male spouses in this study became the chief breadwinners of the family, with their wives taking on part-time employment or voluntary work, once they had settled into gated complexes or high-end high-rises, a subtle shift of responsibilities took

place. The women then assumed most of the domestic responsibilities, or at least the running of the household with the help of permanent and semi-permanent workers.

Yet, Veena Advani's experience demonstrates that precarity in mobility can be offset by resilience; Saroja engineered the move back to India such that both her husband and she could nurture their career graphs, though it did prove to be a struggle managing long hours at the office while dealing with the demands at home. She took care of the emotional well-being of her family, the children's schooling, cultural occasions, and family expectations – though it was not without its challenges. Saroja reveals that despite having a full-time job, the everyday domestic responsibilities such as ordering the monthly gas cylinder, dealing with the cook, the milkman, the driver, the gardener, and general helper - keeping the household ticking as it were, fell to her lot. However, she felt that she had to make it work - *"I wanted to remain a working spouse, not just a trailing one"*. Though she had to prioritise her family responsibilities over her workplace demands, she continued to hold a managerial position at her workplace for many years in Bangalore post return. While conforming to the challenges of expat living, these trailing spouses also worked at providing their children with access to cultural resources. This corroborates the findings of other studies of Indian immigrant wives and mothers in the Global North who play an influential role within their family as upholders of cultural capital (Radhakrishnan, 2011).

Anxiety over the cultural norms in the receiving society and the impact it would have on their offspring, resulted in many migrants like Shilpita harbouring a strong desire to expose their offspring to 'Indian culture' which held out the promise of cultural anchoring. This, coupled with a strong sense of filial duty, acted as a springboard to further their ambition to return one day. Fearful of the prospect of their daughter adopting the *"promiscuity of the West"*, Maria and Stephen looked homeward in search of *"Indian values"* and a sturdy familial network. Despite spending 16 years in Australia leading materially comfortable lives as immigrants, and acquiring Australian citizenship, Lata did all she could to further their desire to return to their *"cultural roots"*. She performed different roles - as a supportive trailing spouse, transnational caregiver, and devoted mother determined not to let her children become *"too Westernised"*.

However, once the initial euphoria had worn off, the couple found the reality of being back amidst their community and family, in a familiar cultural environment, challenging rather than comforting. Their accounts reflect their struggle to accept the disparity between their romanticised idea of the homeland and the lived experience on the ground. Though they attempted to scale down their expectations, the disenchantment with the home society finally resulted in a move back to Australia.

Chapter 7, titled 'Narratives of Resettlement: *But why did you come back in the first place?* ', addresses these issues of disillusionment and acceptance, reluctance and liminality.

Research Question Set 4:

What does return translate into, for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? How does the behaviour of the home society influence the process of resettlement? Does return migration of the Indian diaspora mark the end of a cycle, or does circular migration follow?

Studies on return migration often flag the disappointment of migrants who have nurtured the dream of return for many years and instead experience 'a sense of rupture and alienation' when returning to the place called 'home' (Quayson & Daswani, 2013). Returning to the country of origin is not as straightforward a process as may be assumed (Hammond, 1999; Koser & Black, 1999; Rogge, 1994). Chapter 7, titled 'Narratives of Resettlement: *But why did you come back in the first place?*' focuses on the role of expectations in the post-return migration period, on how these expectations can take on new forms, and influence the quality of resettlement.

The evidence shows that permanent settlement in the home country is not a foregone conclusion. The outcome of return migration varies subjectively and depends greatly on the returnee's capacity to adapt to their environment, and to find the middle path between expectation and actuality. The process can prove challenging as the returning family would have to calibrate their expectations in a self-reflexive manner. This inquiry therefore has focused on teasing out the interconnecting threads between return migration, expectation fulfilment, and circular migration.

The data in this research reveals the interweaving of the lives of transmigrants with their family members and community back in India - their households could indeed be described as networks of linked lives (Bailey et al., 2004). The term 'linked lives' refers to the interdependence of social

relationships, emphasising the influence of others in charting the life course of an individual (Elder, 1994). Returnees have found it an upward battle to establish their credibility as people who are serious about their intent to resettle in their home society. Particularly challenging is the need to continually justify their decision to return in answer to the incredulous question *“But why did you come back in the first place?”*

The findings from this study strengthen the idea that there is a clear link between a welcoming home society and a positive return migration experience. The treatment accorded to the returnee by the receiving society has the power to influence future migration decisions. Participants in this study have reported being the subject of immense community speculation about their reasons to return, with probing questions asked about whether the male returnee, once hailed as an example of immigrant success in the local community, could have returned due to loss of employment. This has proved to be disheartening for the couple in question, with little things assuming large proportions. Lata has shared her discomfort at being derided for being self-reliant, which was met with a patronising *‘Yeh Australia nahin hai’* (this is not Australia). She was also scoffed at for admitting that the chief reason for returning to India was to expose their children to authentic Indian culture. For a transnational Indian migrant like Lata who had always seen her role as the family’s keeper of tradition, such a response was hard to accept. Despite wanting to hold on to ‘liberal’ values, both Lata and her husband felt pressured by familial and social expectations, and the need to perform culturally appropriate roles that only reinforced gendered power imbalances skewed in favour of the male child.

Reallocation of domestic work in line with gendered expectations proved to be another irritant for some of the female migrants who had returned to their home society after many years of nuclear family living in the West. Household work allocation is a marker of cultural notions of gender relations (Ferree, 1991). Many of the female participants in this study noted that their husbands’ attitude towards sharing domestic tasks had changed after return - the spontaneously offered help around the house whilst they were overseas was no longer forthcoming. Research shows that migrants’ task sharing behaviour changes in keeping with changes in socio-cultural environments (Sakka et al., 1999).

This study reaffirms that the family is often the ground on which the heterosexual patriarchal ideal is nurtured and sustained (Thappan, 2001, p.359). Both Veena and Rashmi found that

readjusting to the social and cultural milieu of Indian society meant a return to old-fashioned social customs such as men and women socialising in separate rooms, women expected to defer to the males in the family regarding banking or investment decisions, and single women living alone being disapproved of. After returning to India, Rashmi found her spaces of identity had shrunk to just 'wife' and 'mother' and 'daughter-in-law'. She felt that those categories did not do justice to her potential. The slipping back to a traditional division of duties, especially so in public settings, has cast a slight shadow over what was once a more egalitarian relationship with her husband. However, Rashmi, like most of the other female returnees, admits that there are compensations by way of access to a plethora of domestic helpers, and a luxuriant lifestyle inside her gated community.

Nevertheless, most of them have confessed to feeling stifled by the rigid and dogmatic social code of conduct in the receiving society, which sits at odds with their acquired identity as globetrotting, cosmopolitan citizens of the world. Others who have chosen to stay on, at least for the time being, have retreated into their 'bubble' in gated complexes and assumed a lifestyle that allows them to inhabit a parallel universe. Even after lowering their standard of expectation-fulfilment, they have found it difficult to put their roots down permanently. This reaffirms that the success of return migration is contingent on the expectations-to-experience ratio achieved by the returnees (Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2009).

Limitations of this Study

Before reflecting on the contribution and implications of this research, I first consider some of the limitations of this study.

Return migration to India is a nascent, albeit growing phenomenon. One limitation of this study is the scarcity of official state or central government records on return migration to India. Other reliable statistics have proved elusive, on the exact number of highly skilled returnees, and on how many years have passed since their return, such that we might be able to estimate the magnitude of this phenomenon. However, intermittent reports on demographic profiles of the biggest cities in the country (sparse though they are), anecdotal data, and media accounts indicate that Bangalore is the chief city receiving a steady stream of returnees every year, followed closely by Hyderabad (Sood, 2016; Aleti, 2016; Upadhya, 2014; Chacko, 2007; Dittrich, 2007).

This study of returning migrants and their spouses draws on a limited sample of 24 participants. The returnees comprise a niche segment of the global knowledge economy and are distinctly different from the large group of technology workers who occupy lower rungs of the IT industry such as business processing outsourcing (BPO), and other, less complex data entry organisations. These workers enjoy few options or privileges and have their return migration tied to work visa expiry. While my research departs from convention with its focus on the transnational migration and return of highly skilled migrant professionals, rather than on low and semi-skilled migrants from India to the Global North, around whom much of migration research is currently centred, the group in focus is still relatively small. Admittedly, this narrows the gamut of the inquiry.

However, it was a deliberate choice, as one of the chief aims of this thesis is to shift the research focus from India as a sending country (which has been the dominant theme in migration scholarship on India so far) to the nation as a receiving one where the return is entirely voluntary and tied to reasons other than economic. The small sample size also lends itself to the in-depth scrutiny and interpretivism that is required of a qualitative research approach.

I acknowledge that the composition of this group of migrant professionals is confined to those who have the necessary skill sets and socio-economic resources to be hyper-mobile. Most highly skilled, educated Indians who have been migrating to the Global North since the early 70s, are seen to belong to a privileged section of the upper-class community. One study provides details on how from 1966 to 1977, over 20,000 scientists, 25000 physicians and over 40000 engineers immigrated from India to the US (Vijay Prashad, 2000, as cited in Venugopal, 2021). Indeed, the Indian diaspora in the United States is often referred to as a representation of middle-class mobility (Andersson, 2019). Therefore, this study can be seen as limited in its application across varying socio-economic strata of migrants.

However, this sample of elite migrants exemplifies India's transnational professional class. It is a 'highly visible segment of the Indian diaspora in the West' (Upadhyay, 2013, p.203), carrying both social and economic capital on their migration journeys to both receiving and home societies, and an inquiry into their lived experiences in receiving and home societies, can elicit valuable qualitative data on their notions of identity and belonging within migration processes.

I am also sensitive to the fact that while the selection of research participants was made by adopting the method of purposive sampling, also referred to as 'a judgmental or expert sample' (Battaglia, 2008, p.645-47), it may still be an incomplete representation of this specific

kind of migrant group. It was constructed as a representative sample with respect to a few key characteristics (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000) such as educational attainment, age, skill level, gender, the receiving country, and the number of years spent in the receiving country prior to return. It is possible however, that not every member in this study fulfils all criteria of strata. Equally, the method of snowball sampling, and the constraints of time, may have resulted in the exclusion of more appropriate members for the study. Nevertheless, the goal of the research was to gather deep insights from the self- reflexive narratives of the returnees who did feature in this study. I also accept that biases may have inadvertently crept into the research due to the interviewees' selective memory.

During the interviews the participants would talk about their lives in India before leaving, while also referring to their lives in the receiving country they were in prior to returning. Memory could have played a partisan role in their reminiscences, and it is possible that memory did a lot of editing of what is desirable, and equally, of what is not convenient or comfortable. However, the participants' subjective understanding of their own lived experiences lent itself to the interpretivist research approach adopted in this study.

It was not always possible to gain interviews with the male working spouse since they were tied to their own busy work schedules that included overseas travel. However, the fact that there are more female participants in this study than male, can be viewed from an asset-based perspective rather than a deficit perspective. The accounts of these female migrants who represent the category of 'trailing spouses' widen the boundaries of the research and provide data that is particularly useful in understanding gendered perspectives and experiences.

The site of study for this research was the city of Bangalore in south India because it has emerged as the city of choice for returning highly skilled migrant professionals. Undoubtedly, the quality of return and resettlement has been shaped by that choice. The city has responded by growing in leaps and bounds, albeit in an uneven manner. The character of the city itself appears to have evolved to accommodate this particular elite community's needs and aspirations. It has acquired a glossy patina of glass and chrome workspaces and luxurious residential enclaves such as gated communities that has helped returnees live with people 'like' themselves.

This research and its findings are organically bound to its setting as much as it is to the larger context of the home country. It is possible that future returnees might well settle elsewhere in India, and the return migration experience will be shaped differently.

Future Pathways of Research

Return migration is a complex notion. The idea that one can return to the point where one began, that life can be exactly as it once was, is perhaps what underpins the journey back to the country of origin, rooted in hope and longing, but it is one that offers no certainty of outcome. The migrant who looks homeward does so with expectation and anticipation, yet the realities of return could be far from what was imagined. Resettlement in the home society is a major area of future research that could potentially gather untapped knowledge about the changing nature of migration and mobility to and from the Global South.

Research into return migration processes includes the impact of displacement and settlement, and the search for identity in varying socio-cultural environments. As the narratives of this study indicate, the possibility of remigration could hover indefinitely over the horizon. New patterns of living, and evolving ideas about stability, 'home', and identity are embedded in the transition from immigrant status to transmigrant and then returnee status, which could well change back to immigrant status if migrants choose circular migration as their optimal life path. Perhaps this research could be best served by adopting a longitudinal study approach of both motivations for return and adaptation to the home society, family in tow.

Besides the lack of attention paid to return migration processes and specifically, to Indian return migration, there is also a lacuna in the literature about the importance of interpersonal networks such as family, in both facilitating, and at times, hindering return migration and post-return settlement in the home society. This thesis has attempted to address this gap and employs a critical lens on the influence of family/extended family, and community ties in shaping the resettlement experience for returnees to India. Yet there is much to be explored, given the Indian cultural context of gender ideology that underpins family structures in India, and the prevailing interdependence of social relationships that results in family members leading 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994). All of it has consequences for decision-making in migration processes within life trajectories.

This study has restricted itself to the accounts of first-generation migrant professionals from India and their return migration and resettlement. The offspring of these transmigrants are often brought up in a 'transnational habitus' (Zontini and Reynolds, 2018), which results in

them being embedded in the same social networks as their parents and participating in acts of cultural reproduction in the receiving society. However, there is no guarantee that they will one day return to their country of origin, or even aspire to do so. On the contrary, it is possible that children of immigrants will feel a greater attachment to their adopted country rather than their country of origin (Levitt, 2001; Rumbaut 1998). For instance, research has shown that many of the younger generation of Indian immigrants in the United States find it difficult to reconcile their adult bicultural Indian American identity with aspects of their Indian cultural identity despite their childhood immersion in Indian traditions (Khandelwal, 2002). This could be an ongoing struggle that may or may not culminate in their seeking to reconnect with their diasporic roots through return migration. Using a transnational lens while engaging in long-term ethnographic research to study the second generation through their life-course would provide valuable insights into their migration choices, and their notions of identity and belonging across geographies.

A small group of scholars has been conducting significant research on the emergence of gated communities in India set within the major metropolises in the country that have been more than receptive to the influx of elite returning migrants. The metropole's quest for identity and for a place on the global mobility map appears to run parallel with the returnee's own reflexive search for self, and his strategies of place-making. This offers scope for further research into the 'worlding' of cities like Bangalore (Upadhy, 2013, p.217).

The findings of this study also indicate that there is scarce data available on the resettlement experiences of the children of migrant professional returnees to India. It would be useful to track their adaptation to the Indian schooling system, their coping mechanisms, and their navigation of different cultural environments. This would complement emerging research on the resettlement experiences of elite returnees to the Global South.

Contributions and Relevance of this Study

i. Embracing Mobility and the Un-fixedness of Place

Rather than viewing return migration as a discrete event, this study emplaces migration decisions within the complex intertwining of mobility, transnationalism, place, and identity. In much of the literature on identities, a stable environment is believed to be conducive to maintaining coherent identities; yet the narratives of the migrants in this study indicate that they have embraced mobility and the un-fixedness of place, and that stability is negotiated, and experienced in different ways. The findings of this investigation complement those of an earlier study by Easthope (2009, p.78) who points out that it would be reductive to equate mobility with change, and place with stability. It is evident that both mobility and place play a role in the identity project of the migrant, who feels 'at home in movement' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998, p.27).

Their self-perceived identity as 'global Indians' appears to be in sync with their status as elite migrant professionals carrying transferable skills that allows them to adapt to the nation of their choice. Vocal about their ability to remain mobile, many of them have expressed a desire to see the current return to the home society as a temporary situation. This could set up conditions for liminality, wherein the re-immersion into India happens in fits and starts.

The challenge appears to lie in the reconciling of their hybrid identities acquired over the years as immigrants and transmigrants, with their older, pre-migration identities stored in memory. The data reflects their struggle to balance self-perceptions of who they were once, with who they are now; to let go and to hold on, to retain and to refashion notions of 'home'. Taken together, these results suggest for the returnees in this study, ambiguity about the future path is not a source of anxiety. Uncertainty is viewed not in deficit terms, but rather as an asset; even welcomed, as a form of liberation wherein unsettled futures are perceived as vistas of possibility.

ii. 'Home' Moves with the Migrant

This thesis has argued that 'home' and 'belonging' are inseparable aspects of the transnational condition and inform the migrant's decision to return to their country of origin. Contrary to the previously held notion that within the globalised world of 'flows', identities become detached from place, and that the migrant at the centre of flows becomes 'homeless' (Castells 1996; Hannerz, 1996), this study reaffirms that home and migration must be understood as mutually constitutive and interdependent. These findings complement those of earlier studies (Walsh, 2006; Ahmed et al., 2003; Cresswell, 2001; Brah, 1996). Linked to place, emotions, and loyalties just as much as it does to brick and mortar and documents, 'home' remains a shifting goal post.

Examining both their lived and imagined geographies, I note that 'home' can be experienced as multi-sited, swivelling between the past and the present. In order to do so, transmigrants make optimum use of the array of technology options now available for virtual communication, supporting a variety of ways in which socio-spatial relationships can be maintained across borders. While the concept of 'home' is easier understood in terms of economic and social realities, it is the subjective creation of 'home' through technology platforms that moors and ties the physical dwelling to the social, cultural, and emotive world of the migrant.

Virtual reality is reassuring in the way it reinforces affective bonds, generates co-presence, and reproduces the transnational family (Kaur and Shruti, 2016). Both caregiving and 'emotional streaming' (2014) are made possible by the use of webcam technology. Transnational families thus cope with notions of dual belonging by creating spaces of 'transconnectivity', enabling simultaneous belonging across significant temporal and geographic distances (King-O'Riain, 2013). A significant finding was that the female migrants in the study used new media with ease, to discharge their caregiving duties over vast distances.

iii. Interrogating the 'Model Minority' stereotype

This study has raised important questions about the assumption that people can shape their mobility if they hail from a certain cultural background, which is a primary premise of the model

minority stereotype (Lee, 2009). In the US, Indian migrant professionals, as members of the Asian American community, have the label of 'model minority' to contend with - an epithet that incorrectly suggests that membership in a community known for its accommodating behaviour and professional achievement paves the way for a smoother incorporation into the local community unhampered by racist or exclusionary treatment. The identity of this community is tied to a set template of pliant, even docile behaviour, exhibiting an unflinching focus on academic and professional achievement, a respect for authority and the right family values.

Nevertheless, the accounts of the returnees, especially those who have returned from the US, reveal the ways in which the so-called 'model minority' must deal with troubling issues of precarity and exclusion at various junctures in everyday life. Despite the social and economic capital held by migrant professionals like Saroja Erraguntla, Maria Koshy and Ameera Ali, they could not quite avoid both overt and covert forms of racial discrimination. They responded by adopting various ways of coping such as taking a non-confrontational approach, communicating in an appropriate accent, transiting pragmatically between their Indian and Western identities, or socialising with their own racial and cultural groups.

Saroja for instance, displayed an ability to transit with ease between her Indian and American identities, though it was only made possible because of her class mobility, her association with a global IT industry, and the neo-liberal environment and culturally diverse landscape that came with the turf. She did not therefore experience the social separation that is the lot of many other Indian H-1B workers, but rather flaunted her hybrid identity with pride. The term hybrid serves well because it implies yielding boundaries. When Oliver Joseph rejects the notion of having returned permanently to India, reiterating that he is not 'Indian-Indian' but a 'global Indian', he is in fact asserting his hybrid identity. At various points, this research has referred to the ability of transnational migrants to hold multiple identities, reflecting the overall shift from identities 'rooted in place to hybrid identities characterised by mobility and flux' (Easthope, 2009, p.65). The term 'hybrid' was once used largely to refer to people of mixed race; it has acquired a new dimension in recent literature to connote the 'notion of in-betweenness', implying a blurring of boundaries (Ang in Zournazi, 1998, p.160).

This in-betweenness translates into a form of liminality that permits a smooth transition between different cultural environments. Being members of the so-called 'model minority group' did not

exempt these highly placed migrant professionals from experiencing racial microaggression and discrimination - experiences that are part of the immigrant ecosystem and applying equally to highly skilled immigrants and to immigrants lower down on the skill and status hierarchy. By underlining their experiences, this work broadens the discussion on high-skilled migration and racism, and acknowledges the complexity of settlement and integration for immigrants from the Global South. This study therefore problematizes the notion that highly skilled migrant professionals' incorporation into the receiving society will be uncomplicated, or that they will not be subjected to exclusionary practices. Rather the analysis emphasises the fact that regardless of how highly skilled or financially well-placed they might be, their settlement in the new environment of the receiving society could come at a cost.

iv. Liminal Spaces of Belonging

Upon returning to India, the returnees have chosen to settle into exclusive gated communities that have mushroomed across the cityscape of Bangalore, transforming it into an aspirational 'world city' (Chacko, 2007). This study has considered how gated communities can simultaneously adopt practices of inclusion and exclusion as it turns inward for a sense of community and cohesion, and selectively engages with the world outside its immediate universe. While the gated community serves as a site of mobility convergence (Bal et al, 2017, p.15), and facilitates place-based forms of solidarity and belonging for the inmates, the employers and employees inside the gated community remain bound in unequal interdependence.

The data also shows that while the gated complex furthers the returnee's identity project, it concurrently sets up conditions for what I have described as 'liminal return'. Wedged in between return and remigration, 'liminal return' captures the returnee's self-reflexive state of ambivalence and ambiguity, an emotional experience of in-betweenness. Their simultaneity of belonging can be interpreted as an expression of liminality or 'a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal day-to-day cultural and social states and processes' (Turner 1979, p.465). My study focuses on this elusive space within the return migration process that has largely been overlooked in migration literature.

Applying the conceptual lens of simultaneity which propounds that transnational migrants can be simultaneously attached to both destination country as well as the country of origin (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004, p.1003), this study finds that returning migrants are caught in a transitional

zone, and can harbour multiple, 'flexible identities' (Ong, 1999), 'when one is neither one nor the other but in the process of becoming' (Campbell, 1949, p.). This poses a challenge for the forming, claiming and enactment of a fixed identity, as demonstrated by the narratives in this study. Participants note reflectively that 'we are not who we were when we left this country'; post return to the home society, some assert that they are not '*like the locals*', they are not '*Indian-Indian*' but '*global Indians*', others clarify further - '*global by nature and Indian by culture*'.

These filaments of self-analysis, impelled by their experience of incongruities between expectation and reality during resettlement, though mostly running below the surface of the everyday, spark fissures of doubt about their return migration project. The returnees' introspective act of delving into their own emotional and mental state, and the soul-searching about their past, present and future selves lead them to stay immersed in a pool of 'transitional liminality' - a term describing the condition of 'social actors who are in-between who they used to be (a former identity) and who they might become (a future identity)' (Larson, 2014, p.1003). Their self-reflexivity about who they believe they are, is organically connected to what they might do in the future and could possibly impact their decision-making about whether to continue in the home country or re-migrate again. The state of liminality imbued with 'potency and potentiality' (Turner, 1979, p.466) has a grip on its inhabitants, encouraging them to reconsider their options for the future.

The choice of gated enclaves to set up home again is a powerful metaphor for this state of in-betweenness. This study takes note of the reluctance of returnees to embrace the socio-economic realities of India, and their tendency to retreat from what is sometimes referred to as the 'real India'. There is, simultaneously, an embracing of the largely indeterminate idea of 'Indian culture' and an eschewal of the lived reality on the ground. The 'visual separation' provided by gates and walls of the gated complex (Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004) can be seen as symbolic of the returnee's unwillingness to completely surrender to ground realities of the home country outside the gates of the complex. 'Liminal return' enables them to occupy spaces of privilege on the outskirts of the city, allows for the privatisation of public spaces and the exclusion of the 'other', and juxtaposes the driving need to be with 'people like us' with the deliberate choice of marking themselves as 'different' from the local community.

There is the longing to reclaim sweet memories of 'home' and the simultaneous desire to relinquish old ties. It is this liminality that renders possible an alternate reality for the return migrants - a culturally narrowed, 'appropriately Indian' India inside an aesthetically designed space, where the dust and garbage outside the gates become invisible, and the children can light beautiful Diwali lamps inside the gated complex, on their manicured lawns. The reconnecting with extended family members, the routine of everyday life, and the celebration of returning to the homeland is carried out within the precincts of exclusivity and the safe harbour of liminality.

Thus, it is that inside the gated community, residents live in structured isolation. They inhabit liminal spaces of belonging that enable a reconciliation of the place they have returned to with the places they have returned from; the luxurious aesthetics of the gated community provides them with the line between their imaginary and the reality of India. It is within the recesses of liminal return that emotions of belonging and separation co-exist, where surrender and withdrawal cohere, where the gates remain open and shut at the same time; because ultimately, liminality lies in the mind.

Summarising the Chief Contributions of this Research

The findings from this study contribute to the current literature on migration in four principal ways. Firstly, it addresses a gap in the literature by drawing attention to the inadequate attention given to processes of return migration. Further, it focuses on the little-known phenomenon of return migration to India, and situates the research within the sphere of resettlement in India. It thereby shifts the research lens from India as a sending country to India as a receiving one.

Secondly, the evidence from this study strengthens the idea that the success of the return migration project depends greatly on not just the migrant's level of social and economic integration, but on the quality of the reception given by the home society and extended family to the returnee. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that adaptation to the home society and permanent resettlement will be a natural outcome of return migration. Resettlement is a developing process, there can be no certainty of outcome. Overall, this study expands the canvas on 'migrancy' which can be defined as 'embracing complex migrant subjectivities' (Lawson, 2000, p.174), and reaffirms that the idea of 'return' is an evolving conception. One definition will not do, one size could not possibly fit all; return migration may not be the conclusion, but a substory in a larger mobility narrative.

Thirdly, this thesis is one of a handful of studies on elite return migrants from the global South that interrogates the term 'trailing spouse' - a label, that along with another tag 'tied mover', denotes an inherent passivity and lack of agency that may in fact, be far from the case. Existing literature on elite women migrants such as expatriate female spouses, has tended to emphasise the wife and mother stereotype (Shinozaki, 2014). It adopts a markedly deficit view of their situation and focuses on their precarious and questionably privileged lives. Responding to Phipps' (2022) call to be wary of how our language around migration can 'control and contain' 'limit our thinking' and 'reproduce inequalities in how we understand and represent migration' (p. 24), I problematise the term 'trailing spouse'. My study has examined the gender ideology underpinning migration decisions, and the patriarchy that Indian female returnees must navigate to make a success of resettlement.

The analysis underlines the resilience displayed by trailing spouses whilst engaging with new environments, and their ingenuity in reinventing their professional lives when the opportunity arises. I therefore call for more nuanced and respectful vocabularies to conceptualise female migrant-spouses' experiences, heeding Phipps' (2022) warning that hegemonic ways of seeing and speaking about migration can work to 'reduce, marginalise or render irrelevant' underrepresented populations' voices and lived realities (p. 24).

Fourthly, this thesis makes an important contribution to the folio on typologies of return migration by conceptualising a state of being that I have termed as 'liminal return'. Here I have drawn on the Latin term 'līmen' for threshold, separating one space from another where one transitions across boundaries, to forge a term that can convey the essence of a state of in-betweenness. Caught in the intangible space between return migration and remigration, 'liminal return' personifies the returnees' state of being wherein they straddle both ambivalence and ambition, oscillating emotionally between the desire to settle and the yearning to be mobile again - a delicate balance of mobility and immobility. Conscious that this crucial period tucked within the folds of the return migration process has largely gone unnoticed in the literature, this research has aimed at directing the analytical lens on the singular state of 'liminal return'. The research engages empathetically with the finer threads of the migrant's conflicted emotions and draws into the light the implications of unboundedness within migration processes, and how that might impel and shape future migration decisions.

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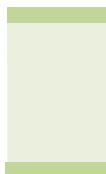
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Appendix 1: Characteristics of Research Participants

NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
1. Lata Gollamudi Age – 49 All members of the family hold Australian Citizenship	Female Hindu	MBA Graduate. Additionally, she completed a Diploma from the Indian Institute of Alternative Medicine, Bangalore	Homemaker. Part-time job as a Nutritionist. Also developing batch-flower remedies Volunteering at her children's schools in Australia and India	16 years	6 years. Then Lata returned to Australia with her family in 2019
2. Amaresh Gollamudi Age – Early 50s All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Male Hindu	MBA Graduate & Software Engineer	Senior Manager in an international software company based in the US. Travels between Australia (where the family now resides) and the US	16 years	6 years. Then Amaresh returned to Australia with his family in 2019
3. Asha Hegde Age – 45 US Citizenship	Female Hindu	Master's degree in art education from an Ivy League University in New York, US	Currently offering Art Education programs to students in 18 schools in Bangalore Marital Status: Single	20 years	8 years

NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
			Offers free art tuition to needy children		
4. Rashmi Thomas Age – 50 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Christian	Bachelor's degree in management from a university in Switzerland. Master's degree in Public Policy from an Ivy League University in the US.	Worked as a financial analyst in the US. Currently a homemaker and holds a part-time job teaching the piano. Offers free tuition in Mathematics and English, to secondary students in government schools. Also volunteers at a centre for battered women. Occupation of spouse: Senior management position in venture capital at an international financial firm based in the US. Heads the Bangalore branch of the company	13 years	15 years

NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUC ATION OCCU PATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN	
5. Veena Advani Age – 54 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	MBA in International Business & Marketing from an American university	Worked in a statistical software company in the US. Moved to a job in Marketing and Product Management. Later set up her own chemicals sourcing company in Chicago. Continued to run her business from India for a few years, then gave it up to pursue a career in the non- profit sector. Occupation of Spouse: Currently Holds a senior management position at a financial services company headquartered in Chicago – travels between India and the US	16 years	12 years



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
6. Sandra D'souza Age – 44 Husband and wife are Indian Citizens, but their daughter holds US citizenship.	Female Christian	Bachelor's degree in banking. MBA graduate.	Currently working at a bank in India as a financial analyst. Occupation of spouse: Currently, a software engineer at a company in India.	5 years	6 years
7. Nagesh Alluri Age – 54 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Male Hindu	Information Technology Engineer	Currently working with an international software company. Also a Partner in wife's Maya's entrepreneurial venture in home baking	15 years	7 years
8. Maya Alluri Age – 49 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	PhD degree in Audiology	Worked in a hearing aid company in the US. Currently founder of an artisan bakery in Bangalore, in partnership with her husband Nagesh Alluri	15 years	7 years



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
9. Gayatri Sastri Age – 48 All members of the family hold Indian Citizenship	Female Hindu	Bachelor's degree in Engineering. MBA graduate from a leading management institute in India	Currently working as a Financial Consultant in Bangalore Occupation of spouse: Financial Analyst in an international company based in India	4 years	10 years
10. Priya Naidu Age – 52 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering.	Worked at a French multinational corporation in the US, and later in Financial Risk Management in a US firm. Quit her job in 2008. Currently a homemaker. A volunteer with ASHA for Education (US-based charity with chapters all over India), and at Urmul Jyoti in Bikaner - residential camps to	13 years	11 years

NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
			educate girls in Rajasthan. Occupation of spouse: Previously in Asset Management, currently holding a senior position in an American multinational technology corporation.		
11. Dr Manoj Nair Age – 61 All members of the family hold British Citizenship	Male Hindu	MBBS. MBChB. MRCP	Worked as a General Practitioner (GP) for over 30 years at a hospital in England	34 years	Not Applicable
12. Meera Nair Age – 59 All members of the family hold British Citizenship	Female Christian	Bachelor's degree in nursing	Homemaker	34 years	Not Applicable



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
13. Oliver Joseph Age – 48 Both husband and wife and one child are Indian Citizens, but the second child is a US citizen	Male Christian	Degree in Computer Engineering	Currently works with a US based software technology company. Travels between India and the US	13 years	11 years
14. Rita Joseph Age – 45 Both husband and wife and one child are Indian Citizens, but the second child is a US citizen	Female Christian	Bachelor's degree in English and History	Entrepreneur. Founded and runs (along with her husband) a fitness centre for would-be athletes - holds international sports camps in Bangalore	6 years	11 years
15. Maria Koshy Age – 47 All members of the family are US citizens	Female Christian	MBA	Currently works as a Financial Professional in an investment firm in India.	12 years	11 years



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
16. Stephen Koshy Age – 50 All members of the family are US citizens	Male Christian	Master's degree in Engineering	Has set up his own company retailing computer hardware parts, in India.	16 years	11 years
17. Shilpita Khanna Age – 49 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	Master's degree in Fine Art.	Artist. Holds exhibitions in India. Also offers art classes to under-privileged children. Occupation of spouse: Heads the investment banking division in India, of an international financial firm	8 years	15 years
18. Indu Iyer Age – 48 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	Master's degree in Molecular Biology & Microbiology	Currently Head - Curriculum Development at an international school in Bangalore	10 years	11 years

NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
			Occupation of spouse: Hardware engineer in a multinational company in India.		
19. Saroja Erraguntla Age – 54 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Hindu	Master’s degree in Hardware Engineering. Worked at INTEL in the US, and after return, at INTEL in India	Worked for over 25 years in an Occupation of spouse: Environmental Consultant in India.	15 years	16 years
20. Ameera Ali Age – 50 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Female Muslim	Master’s degree in Mass Media Studies.	Currently working as a Public Relations Manager in a media company in Bangalore Also working as a volunteer with a non- profit to draw attention to Bangalore’s perennial	11 years	11 years



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
			problem of 'foaming lakes'. Occupation of spouse: Software engineer with an Indian firm.		
21. Aadil Rahman Age – 53 All members of the family hold US Citizenship	Male Muslim	MBA (Finance)	Finance professional. Currently heading his own start-up in venture capital in the US. Occupation of spouse: Interior Designer.	22 years	5 years. Currently moves between his residences in both countries.
22. Jyoti Desai Age – 46. Both Jyoti and her son hold US citizenship	Female Hindu	MBA (Finance)	Currently works as a Financial Analyst in the US. Marital Status: Divorced	12 years	2 years. Then returned to the US in 2020
23. Murli Basavaraju	Male Hindu	Degree in Computer Engineering	Currently works as a software engineer in the UK	8 years	Not applicable



NAME, AGE & CITIZENSHIP	GENDER & RELIGION	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS ABROAD	YEARS IN INDIA AFTER RETURN
Age – 42 Holds a UK Work Visa					
24. Upasna Basavaraju Age – 37 Holds a UK Dependent Visa	Female Hindu	Degree in Computer Engineering	Currently looking for part-time work as a software engineer	6 years	Not applicable

In addition to the above 24 chief participants in the study, I conducted informal interviews with 10 other local informants, in order to gain a better understanding of the context of the research. Of these, 7 were female, and 3 were male.

All names in the above table have been anonymised to ensure data privacy.



Appendix 2

Interview Guide

The interview instrument was designed with the goal of achieving a nuanced account of the dynamics of adaptation to the home society. A flexible interview guide was drafted – one that moved across key topics and comprising questions that were biographical, attitudinal, and experience-based. These included broadly, but were not limited to, the participants' initial migration motives, their lives in the host country, their reasons and preparation for return, their resettlement experiences upon return, participants' challenges with peer relationships after returning, the role of transnational networks in their decision-making, and their plans and aspirations for the future.

The sub-questions that were woven into the main line of inquiry sought to understand the day-to-day experiences of settlement, with regard to running the house, schooling dilemmas, employment for the trailing spouses, social interaction, the domestic helpers and service providers, and their own comparative views on the quality of life in India versus the lives they had led prior to return. The goal was to encourage them to produce narratives about the self and identity, drawing on their personal experiences and understanding of the world (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Narrative interviews are 'interpretive devices through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others' (Lawler, 2002). Therefore, a descriptive-type approach to questioning was adopted - broad, open 'grand tours' (Spradley, 1979) which runs on the lines of 'tell me about your experience of', 'what was it like being', and so on.

Broad areas covered and sample questions:

i. Stage of Life/Time of Return to India:

- When did you come back to India?
- How many years had you spent overseas before returning?
- Were there visits to India - annual / intermittent?
- Why did you return at this juncture of your lives?

ii. Preparation before Return to India:

- When did you first think about returning to India? Was it an idea, a notion, or was it a goal that took shape in the mind?
- Did you see others returning?
- Did you discuss your return migration plans with anyone? Did you come across any articles about it, or did this idea come up at social meetings with friends / the Indian community in the receiving society?
- Once you decided to return, did you set a date? How did you decide on the actual date?
- What preparations did you have to make in terms of your employment / financial planning / future housing... Did you sell your previous house in the receiving society? Did you buy a house in India?
- Schooling for children?
- Visiting India before returning to India - were you familiar with, or did you familiarise yourself with the social and cultural norms / traditions here? Reach out to relatives / friends / extended family members to make arrangements? Did you do a recce trip before actually returning to India?
- Where did you want to live, after returning... the city you grew up in? The city or town where your parents live? Or some other city? What were the factors that influenced that choice?
- Foreign citizenship - did you retain it or give it up? Green card? Overseas Citizenship of India Card (OCI Card)?

iii. Motivations for Return:

- Do tell me about your reasons for deciding to come back to India... What were your motivations?
- Were you in touch with family and friends in India while you were in the receiving country?
- What did your family members and friends / other members of your network in India think about you returning to India? What kind of advice did they give you, and was it helpful?
- How comfortable are you with digital technology? What virtual platforms did you use for connecting with your family members and friends, if you were using any?

iv. Education and Employment:

- Questions about participants' schooling and higher education.
- When did you start working? What area of work? How long have you been in this job? Type of work contract?
- Do you have another professional occupation? Career graphs.
- How about overseas travel for the lead working spouse? How long are these trips, how frequent? Are you in touch with colleagues from your previous workplaces?
- Details sought about the jobs they currently hold in India; did they come on intra-company transfer, or was it a new assignment? Further details.
- Their experiences of different work cultures. Any work stress? How is the work environment and interaction with colleagues on a day to day basis - professionalism, meeting deadlines, completing projects...? Work satisfaction and rewards.
- Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of return migration in relation to the workplace.
- Did you ever consider setting up a business or a non profit or any other venture of your own? Changing India - opportunities, limitations.

v. Marriage:

- In relation to your marriage, was it an arranged one? Or did you select your partner on your own?
- When and where did it take place?
- Discussion on familial involvement in the marriage, expectations prior to the marriage.
- Interaction with in-laws, extended family, relatives, community.

vi. Female migrants / Trailing spouses:

- Her role in migration decision-making.
- The challenges and rewards of moving with one's spouse.
- Her employment prospects/ career trajectory
- Her personal and professional goals
- How has it been on the whole, in terms of identity, and belonging?
- Domestic life overseas, division of household duties while in the receiving society and after return migration.
- Parenting duties.
- Staying connected to familial and social networks transnationally - did that happen, how was it managed, the means? The frequency of virtual meetings, physical visits?
- Social life (making friends, staying in touch with older connections, maintaining care networks)
- Cultural practices in both receiving society (cultural reproduction) and in the home society after return migration.
- Working in the nonprofit sector - what were the motivations for this? What are the opportunities available, which area of work have you chosen? Could you tell me a little more about wanting "to do something for India"?
- Navigation of gender roles and gendered expectations.
- To one participant who is a single woman , and an arts education professional - what were the challenges you had to face after returning to India - as a single woman living alone, in terms of finding accommodation, dealing with everyday issues in the society

you live in, the manner in which you are perceived by society in general. Could you share your experiences of how you were received by family, friends, neighbours? What about your experiences in the workplace - did you make connections easily, find suitable work, find people receptive to your ideas about reform in art education? Have you made friends here? Do you go back to the US often?

vii. Children:

- How many children do you have?
- How old are they now? How old were they when you returned to India?
- Which schools do they go to? What were the factors that made you select that school?
- Where is it located? How about your neighbours or friends within the gated community
 - where do their children study?
- Have you made any plans for their higher education? Would they like to join a university in India, or in some other country? If so, where?
- Have your children settled into India? What do they feel about their schools?
- Parenting experiences.

viii. Choice of city and residence:

- What made you choose Bangalore as the city to resettle in?
- The changing nature of the city of Bangalore - a world city?
- Why did you choose a gated complex (GC) to reside in?
- How is the experience of living in a gated community? Details of everyday life sought - the kind of lifestyle, the number of helpers and their interactions with them, the security system, the spatiality of the gated complex, where do the children play, the Club, the comforts/problems of a GC, the social and cultural life, their neighbours, celebration of festive events, their interactions with people in the city outside the GC, how often do they go out to the main city areas... and related questions that aimed to gather the intricate details of living in the city of return.
- The advantages and disadvantages of living in a gated community.

ix. Resettlement Experiences:

- The first few months after returning to India - what was the experience like?
- How was it to meet your extended family members, friends, old colleagues?
- Did you make many new friends? What about your spouse, your children...
- What did it feel like, when you returned... How do you feel now?
- Designing their homes after return - doing up the interiors of their homes. Artefacts, garden, interior designing. Comparisons to previous lived spaces.
- Have you reconnected with your old social and cultural networks...
- Did you have to re-adapt to everything, to all of the old customs and ways of socialising, connecting? Did you bring in some things, some ways of living from your life overseas?
- Your views on the infrastructure, the spatiality of their surroundings both inside and outside their gated communities. How do your surroundings compare with the other part of the city, and the rest of the country?
- Challenges of peer interactions.
- Do you know of people who have returned to India - do you know anything about their experiences after return?

x. On a Reflexive Note:

- In terms of self-perception how would you describe yourself - your identity?
- What would you call 'home'?
- Where do you feel at home?
- Can you share with me some of your memories of life in the receiving country?
- Did you ever face any discrimination, or ever feel unwelcome in any situation while you were overseas? At your workplace, or public space... or in your neighbourhood? Were you conscious of your race or ethnicity?
- Did you join any Indian or other cultural associations in the receiving country? If so, what made you do that... How was the experience?
- Did you feel the need for your children to connect with 'Indian culture'? How do you interpret the term 'culture' - what does it mean for you and your family? Did it play a role in deciding to come back?

- How had you visualised India in your mind before coming back? All those years of living in different countries - did India, or your memories of India - did it feature in your mind at all? In what way?
- Your imaginaries of India before coming back - did the reality meet your expectations? What were your first impressions, and has anything changed in the way you perceive your situation? What's it like really, to be back here in India? Do you feel welcome here? How have your relatives and old friends reacted to your return?
- It has been a few years now since your return - do you think you have adapted to the country? Was it easy or difficult to do so? Could you share your experiences with me?
- Looking back at what you have done... are you still on the path you want to be on...
- The local and the global. 'Global Indian'? What does 'being Indian' or a 'global Indian' really mean?
- Are you happy with your decision to return?

xi. Future Plans:

- Will you and your spouse be continuing here in India, in the event that your children go abroad for their studies? Or do you plan to move with them?
- Regardless of the plans for your children's higher education, how do you see the future unfolding? Would you like to continue living in India? Or do you think you might be migrating again? Or is it uncertain at the moment?
- How do you feel about change? How easy or difficult is it?
- Now given your experience in India, would you like to continue to live here, or if you had an opportunity, would you go back to the US or any other receiving country?

Appendix 3

Abbreviations

ICT	Information Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
IOM	International Organisation for Migration, United Nations
BPO	Business Processing Outsourcing
CA	Conversation Analysis
DA	Discourse Analysis
GC	Gated Community
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organisation. A non-profit
NRI	Non-Resident Indians
OCI	Overseas Citizen of India
STPI	Software Technology Park of India
TA	Thematic Analysis
WMR	World Migration Report
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Vernacular phrases translated into English

Vernacular phrases occasionally cropped up in the interaction with the participants in this study - these were incorporated in the final write-up, as it carries authentic expression.

Aap log khud aaye ho na - It was your own decision to return

Bala Vihars - Classes providing Indian spiritual and cultural orientation to children

Bhajan - Devotional songs

Bindi – A small coloured mark that is worn between the eyebrows, especially by Hindu women

Desi - The term has evolved from the word ‘desh’ which means homeland in the Hindi language

Gora-chitta - Fair and good-looking

Hijab - A headcovering worn by Muslim women

Ho jayega - It will get done

India mein koi seedhi tarah se jaata nahin hai - Nobody follows the straight path in India

Itna achha chal raha tha, sab chod kar aaye ho... lekin aap aaye hi kyon?

Everything was going well for you, but you left it all to come back here... why? But why did you come back?

Jholawala artist: Here Shilpita makes a reference to the artist stereotype in India - the impoverished artist carrying a cheap cloth bag containing his painting brushes.

Kya ho jayega? - What will happen?

Kurti - An upper garment worn in the Indian subcontinent by females, similar to the loose collarless shirt known as kurta worn by males

Mandir - Temple

Mundu - The mundu is a garment worn around the waist in South India

Naashta ho gaya kya? - Have you had breakfast?

Namma Bengaluru - a colloquial phrase that translates into 'our Bangalore'

Peda - An Indian milk sweet

Puja room - A small room or space set aside in the home for quiet prayer

Puja - Act of worship

Salwar-kameez - a set of light, loose, pleated trousers, usually tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn with a kameez or tunic top, by women in South Asia

Saree or sarees: a flowing length of cotton or silk wrapped around the body in folds, traditionally worn by women in South Asia

Satsang – Community religious meeting

Thali - A round steel platter used to serve food in South Asia with individual bowls for vegetable and meat servings

Tulsi – Holy basil plant is native to the Indian subcontinent and used in daily worship

Ulta-pulta - Topsy-turvy

Uska jhootha woh khud nahin uthaatha - He will not carry the plate he has eaten from...it must be done for him

Visarjan - An annual Hindu religious ritual whereby the clay deity of the elephant god Ganesha is immersed in a water body after the prescribed period of worship, to symbolise the cycle of life and death, and the release of the immortal soul)

Yeh Australia nahin hai - This is not Australia

Yahan pe aise hi hota hai - It is like this only in India

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

PhD Sociology

Title of Thesis:

**‘But why did you come back in the first place?’
Return Migration to India: Narratives of Longing and Belonging,
‘Home’ and Identity**

Fieldwork: Qualitative Interviews

Researcher: Mini Chandran Kurian, University of Edinburgh, Student ID: s1772536

Summary:

My study focuses on the resettlement experiences of highly skilled returning Indian migrants, and the ways in which returnees negotiate notions of identity, ‘home’ and belonging. Migration literature on India has been largely built around its status as one of the top 3 sending countries in the world. My doctoral thesis aims to shift the research focus to the growing phenomenon of return migration of the highly skilled Indian diaspora from the Global North in the context of increased mobility, globalization, and transnationalism.

The main research site is the city of Bangalore, and specifically, gated communities, which is where the subjects of my study reside. Since the research objectives in this study are centred on teasing out the intangible threads of aspirations, attitudes, and motivations, from a mosaic of lived experiences, sensitively, and in depth, a qualitative research approach has been adopted in this study. Self-reflexive narratives on the actual day-to-day experiences of resettlement, including details on interaction with extended family members and community, housing and schooling, employment, service providers and gatekeepers, social interaction, and cultural participation, could provide rich data into the challenges and rewards of return. It is hoped that the findings of this study will also provide insights into whether this return migration is a permanent one, or a form of circular migration. Thus, I employ qualitative techniques like semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and repeat contact sessions to capture the nuances of post-return settlement.

The interviews will be recorded by the researcher, for study and analysis. Access to these interviews will be restricted to the researcher and the university supervisors and examiners. All data will be kept confidential and secure, and anonymized for greater data protection and privacy protection.

Research Questions:

1. How do migrants engage in identity formation in both the receiving country and country of origin post return? How does the conceptual imaginary of 'home' translate into migrant homemaking? How do transnational migrants grapple with the experience of simultaneous belonging?
2. What are the push-pull factors that impact the Indian migrant's decision to return to India?
3. How are notions of 'home' and 'belonging' understood within the setting of gated communities? To what extent do gated communities in India reinforce lines of separation and stratification in society?
4. My study also examines the identity construction of gender within this migration process. How do returnees resettle in India, navigate existing social and cultural norms, and gendered expectations? What are the experiences of the female 'trailing spouses' in this study?
5. What expectations did they have about their 'homeland'? What kind of lifestyle/career expectations did they nurture? What does return translate into, for the Indian returnee? Do expectations match reality? How does the behaviour of the home society influence the process of resettlement? Does return migration mark the end of a cycle, or does circular migration follow?

Timeframe for the Interviews:

The duration of each interview will not exceed 60 to 90 minutes, as far as possible. I will use a flexible template of questions for all my participants. I will resort to telephone interactions at various stages of interviewing if needed.

Name and Address of Researcher:

Mini Chandran Kurian, PhD Sociology Candidate, University of Edinburgh
9/2 - Forth House, 9E Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. Postcode: EH88FQ.
Tel: +447459527363



INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Fieldwork: Qualitative Interviews

PhD Sociology Thesis:

'But why did you come back in the first place?' Return Migration to India: Narratives of Longing and Belonging, 'Home' and Identity

Researcher: Mini Chandran Kurian, University of Edinburgh, Student ID: s1772536

Research Participant's Name:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from UK institutions require that interviewees agree explicitly to be interviewed, and agree to how the information contained in the interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you please read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet and then sign this Consent Form to certify that you approve of the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced.
- You will be given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.
- The transcript/ content of the interview will be analysed by Mini Chandran Kurian as PhD researcher.
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Mini Chandran Kurian, and her university supervisors and examiners.
- Any summary of the interview content, or direct quotations from the interview that are made available through academic publications or other academic outlets, will be anonymized so that neither you nor your location can be identified.

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes

No

Taking Part

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet dated / / .

☐☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions

☐☐

about the project and am free to contact the researcher again with further questions.

I agree voluntarily to take part in the research project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded. Any summary of the interview content, or direct quotations from the interview that are made available through academic publications or other academic outlets, will be anonymized so that I cannot be identified and neither can my location.

☐☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I do so.

☐☐

I do not expect any benefit or payment for my participation.

☐☐

I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.

☐☐

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Name and Address of Researcher: Mini Chandran Kurian, 9/2 Forth House, 9E Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. Postcode: EH88FQ. Tel: +447459527363

Appendix 6: PHOTOGRAPHS

Glimpses of Bangalore & Gated Complexes in the city

Bangalore is usually the first choice of most returning migrants, particularly because it is the favoured location for software giants, multinational companies, international organisations, and research institutes. In addition, it offers a wide range of high-end gated complexes where the returnees can continue to access a higher standard of living, like the one they were accustomed to in the previous receiving countries.

Swanky self-contained apartment-complexes with large grounds, and service apartment complexes for wealthy Non-Resident Indians have sprung up, both close to the modern city centre and in the newly developed, high-income residential areas of the urban mid-periphery (Dittrich, 2007). Dominating the landscape are gated residential complexes in the Euro-American architectural style that have been blossoming on the peripheries of cities like Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad over the last 20 years. Promoted as an exclusive living environment, these gated complexes are being projected as idyllic living spaces, providing its residents with 'not just a home, but a ready-made community' (Chacko and Varghese, 2009, p.57)



A villa inside a gated community in Bangalore (pic:<https://luxuryproperties.in/top-luxury-villa-projects-in-bangalore/>)



(pic: Mini Kurian) **A villa inside a gated community in Bangalore**

Each sprawling gated community or GC, as the residents call it, runs into several acres of land, filled with broad winding roads flanked by a variety of trees, mango groves, small gardens, and outdoor seating areas. Most of these gated complexes are carefully designed to replicate the look and feel of Western suburbia (Upadhyaya, 2013), complete with the classic American front lawns and endless sidewalks where kids can cycle freely, sloped roofs and open spaces.

Amenities range from swimming pools, jogging tracks, badminton courts, a visitors' parking area, medical centres, and shopping arcades, to round the clock security, ATMs, broadband connectivity, fire safety measures, piped gas, and solar power. Some gated complexes include a gym, yoga rooms, a community hall, a food court, and an auditorium. A large gated complex could have over a hundred security guards patrolling the grounds, parking space for a few thousand cars, and use up 1.2 million litres of water a day.



(pic: Mini Kurian) **Inside a gated complex in Whitefield, Bangalore**



Other examples of gated complexes in Bangalore:

<https://www.prestigeconstructions.com/projects/prestige-white-meadows/>



An exclusive high-rise apartment building in Bangalore (pic: Mini Kurian)



<https://www.prestigeconstructions.com/projects/prestige-white-meadows/>



A Clubhouse inside a gated complex

Occupying a central position in the everyday lives of the residents is the deluxe Clubhouse
(pic: Mini Kurian)



A Clubhouse inside a gated complex

(pic: Mini Kurian)

Bangalore City

Once known as the 'Garden City' due to its profusion of green spaces and 'tree-lined streets' (Chacko and Varghese, 2009, p.59; Sudheera, 2008, p.119), it was later hailed as a 'Pensioner's Paradise' (Mukherjee, 2013, p.401). It was only in the late 1990s that the character of the city changed, from a comfortable, middle-class ambience with an economy that centred around its public sector enterprises in 'aeronautics, space research, radar and remote sensing, military equipment, and factory tool-making' (Goldman, 2011, p.235), to an expanding megacity hosting one of the most rapidly growing IT clusters in the world (Sonderegger and Taube, 2010). Currently, Bangalore has been hailed variously as 'a beacon of the globalising world' (Sudheera, 2008, p.137), the 'Electronics Capital of India' (Dittrich, 2007, p.45), and as the 'Silicon Valley of India' (Heitzman, 2003, p.57).



Tech Park in Bangalore. Photo by Bishnu Sarangi on Pixabay

<https://pixabay.com/photos/building-architecture-modern-1659315/>



<https://www.embassyofficeparks.com/ourportfolio/bangalore/embassy-manyata/>



Tech Park In Bangalore <https://community.nestaway.com/info/tech-parks-in-bangalore/>

Bangalore along with Hyderabad, are often referred to as 'world cities' (Chacko, 2007, p.132) in recognition of their importance as global IT hubs and as cities of choice for highly skilled transnationals (Chacko, 2007, p.132). However, in truth, the epithet 'world city' sits awkwardly on a metropolis like Bangalore, governed as it is by an unwieldy and constantly vacillating state apparatus. Although Bangalore has seen accelerated growth in various other sectors such as aviation, space, biotechnology, and education, besides IT; its infrastructural growth has not kept pace.



<https://newskarnataka.com/more/weekend-crowd-at-city-market-in-bangaluru>



A suburb named Malleshpalya in one of the eastern parts of Bengaluru city. Representative of many other suburbs in the main city area, with smaller, often substandard housing, and fewer amenities, providing a contrast to the new gated enclaves in Bangalore, that represent 'pockets of prosperity and islands of well-being'.



Street scene in Bangalore.

Pic: Mini Kurian. **Street in Bangalore city**

Photo by Madvortex on Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/search/bangalore/>

The city is increasingly burdened by an inefficient sewage system and seemingly interminable traffic gridlocks. Resources like roads, public transport, water supply, energy, land, and housing, have proved to be erratic in supply and quality. The result is an uneven development of civic infrastructure and facilities to support the density of software and service industries, financial complexes, and global headquarters of multinational companies.



pic: <https://gomechanic.in/blog/bangalore-is-the-worlds-most-traffic-congested-city/>



Pic: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/bengaluru-has-the-worst-traffic-in-the-world-report-11580278531554.html>

Traffic congestion in Bangalore city - a perennial problem



Overview of Bangalore city. Photo by Vishwanth P on Unsplash

<https://unsplash.com/s/photos/bangalore>