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A Companion to the Anthropology of India

Edited by
Isabelle Clark-Decès

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CHAPTER **24**

**Transnational
India: Diaspora
and Migration in
the Anthropology
of South Asia**

Leo Coleman

The last two or three decades in India – and in other countries of South Asia, though to differing degrees – have witnessed what has been heralded as a remarkable opening, liberalization, and expansion of the cultural space of the subcontinent into and astride global flows of money, power, and meaning. Anthropological studies of various dimensions of this process have surveyed the global advertising of India and the local advertising of global products in Bombay (Mazzarella 2003); the predicament of Indian families struggling to maintain bonds across transnational space (Lamb 2009; Leonard 2007; Mankekar 2005); the transformation of local economies in South Asia as thousands leave for jobs overseas, either as migrant laborers or as high-status professionals (Gardner 2005; Xiang 2007); and the effect of “new” South Asian immigrants in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere on relations between culture, identity, and politics (Shukla 2003; Werbner 2002). Some scholars have particularly focused on how these changing relations in Western liberal democracies are experienced by the children of South Asian immigrants, struggling to define their place in and identification with at least two countries (Raj 2003; Hall 2002).

These recent literatures on “transnational India” (a necessarily reductive term we might take, for the moment, as a general rubric) share a definite sense of a massive change in the place of South Asia in the global cultural economy, and in the “idea of India” itself (Khilnani 1997:144–149). Such changes are measured,

often, in the real intensification of exchanges and encounters between people and cultures. Migration from South Asia to, on the one hand, Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, and on the other, to the kingdoms of the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, has increased massively since the 1960s, though in highly specific patterns. In the other direction, the influx of money and media into South Asia since the 1990s, as well as increased opportunities in Indian cities for employment with and direct connection to transnational firms, have transformed the "global horizons" of many South Asians *in situ*, as it were (Hansen 2001; Boo 2004).

Economic liberalization on the subcontinent since the 1990s, and wider transnational developments in capitalism since the 1970s, have been a prominent, if not dominant, framework in which studies of the South Asian diaspora and globalization have been situated. But such a focus on state reform or economic calculations (even on the calculations of individual migrants themselves) cannot encompass the detailed effects of South Asian migrations that have been documented in these ethnographic studies – effects that can be registered both within the subcontinent and beyond. That is to say, any contemporary understanding of South Asia and its cultures must grapple with transnational practices of imagination, and how they shape international migration as well as the local fixities and mobilities sustained by it. This means registering efforts at translation, transfiguration, and transposition in the cultural imagination of those affected by these developments. It is this latter object – the cultural imagination and its translations and transformations – which is the most distinctive object of anthropological studies of transnational India and South Asia, and it is one suited to located ethnographies, attentive to the details of histories, lives, and meanings in the making.

What effects has the transnationalization of India had within South Asian anthropology? While new problems emerge from studies of transnational India, the work of anthropology remains much the same. There are certainly methodological challenges to studying social lives and social relationships that are in motion, that extend across multiple locations and even scales of belonging (local, national, transnational – in which even the transnational can be a location). The task remains constantly to unpick the strands of meaning that shape cultures, and account for how they are rewoven with every transition and translation, producing meanings beyond any individual intention. We might recall, in passing, that Geertz's famous description of culture as "turtles all the way down" (2000:28–29), by which he meant always embedded in webs of signification and elaborations of interpretation, was in his telling the correction of an overly rationalist Englishman by a wise Indian.

Diasporic cultures underscore the ways in which culture is itself always a claim and an interpretation, at some distance from origins or authenticity. Anthropological knowledge is only an interpretation of these interpretations. This is not a novel insight, and one which does not need diasporic cultures to illuminate it. But it takes on a special color in the case of the South Asian diasporas, and the anthropologies they have provoked, for there is a critical duty that comes with this reweaving of interpretations. The challenge of the transnational and the diasporic to contemporary anthropology is, perhaps, to encourage us to hold in tension both the real continuities of relation, affiliation, and interpretation that span locations, and the abstractions, simplifications, and abusive fantasies of belonging – and of those who

do not belong – that are called “culture”; that is, to rethink, and reclaim, culture both as a name for enduring social forms and forms of belonging, and as a mobile, febrile, network of significations that cannot, or should not, ever be thought of as property – certainly not of any one group. “India” is an invention like any other, nations are not natural, culture is dialogic and contested, constituted as much by difference – and from outside its “own, proper” place – as by any (imagined) unity and fixity in location. Each of these arguments has been essayed as a warrant for, and a context of, anthropological work on South Asian diasporas and Indians, Pakistanis, Sikhs, and others “abroad.”¹

Yet what purchase does our own critique of abstractions of identity and belonging give us on the abstractions of the people we study among, when we encounter them as claims of exclusive identity and essentialized culture? People continue to reshape the notion of India, and the practices of South Asian culture, as they move and settle in diverse parts of the world. Anthropologists look for the transnational effects of and on South Asian culture through the decisions people make about whom to marry, where to live, and what kind of relations they maintain with their kin and with those who share a connection with particular parts of South Asia. Through such ethnographic studies, scholars try to account for transformations of economic space and in ideas of Indian culture, as well as in institutions like dowry and caste. Confronted by claims of an essential Indian culture, a pristine homeland of tradition and value – as they are made in the daily practices of South Asians abroad or in movies that represent that experience for a worldwide audience – anthropologists are aided in their critique of such abstractions by the multifarious experiences we document as we engage with the people living amidst these transformations.

Thus four key themes emerge from anthropologies of South Asians abroad. The first theme, “Multiple migrations” is primarily historical, and concerns the diversity of the Indian diaspora, constituted by multiple migrations extending back to precolonial trade routes and networks of merchants. The present discussion will content itself with beginning with colonial labor migrations that formed Indian communities across the British Empire, now often characterized as the “old” diaspora, but still a historically and culturally salient context for much of the current experience of Indians overseas. The second theme, “Discrepant geographies and divergent trajectories,” examines the uneven geographies of globalization, and the impact within the subcontinent of flows of money and ideas in transnational circuits. The third theme, “Nationalism in exile” focuses on the effects of migration on the nation and on national belonging, in particular the role of diaspora in forming an idea of India that has in recent times often taken the form of an exclusivist and fundamentalist “Hindutva” ideology. This section also broaches the processes of abstraction and disjuncture that have preoccupied anthropological theorizing on transnationality, an innovative body of work that has been influential in the study of South Asian diasporas, and which is examined more closely in the fourth theme, “Transnational publics.” The ethnographies in this section, collectively, indicate that forms of solidarity and belonging across national and state boundaries are in formation, but that these are built – or at least, best examined ethnographically – through material and meaningful connections between persons, communities, and places, rather than abstract flows of commodities (or commodity-images) or preexisting and immutable loyalties.

MULTIPLE MIGRATIONS

Diasporic South Asians come in many varieties and from all over the subcontinent. A comprehensive survey of migrations and diasporas from South Asia would have to start with the trade, migration, and cultural links that fostered the expansion of Buddhism, that extended Indic kingship and Hindu religious forms to Bali and elsewhere, and that shaped a precolonial Indian Ocean world which has for some time become a prominent object of historical study, and lately of anthropological concern (see Basu 2008). The recent academic use of the term "Indian diaspora," however, is usually bounded by histories of colonialism and labor migration, in particular the massive movements of colonial subjects as indentured laborers.

Starting from the British abolition of slavery in the 1830s and continuing into the early twentieth century, Indian "coolies" replaced the labor of enslaved Africans in the far-flung plantations of the British Empire – signally in Fiji and Trinidad – and constituted communities of "overseas Indians" (as later scholarship would term them, borrowing colonial categories) in those island nations as well as in Guyana and South Africa. Migrants departing from the ports of Calcutta and Madras in this period converged as laborers in a colonial system, finding themselves working and living with other Indians who shared neither language nor immediately congruent religious or cultural traditions. "Free" laborers and merchants also moved abroad in the colonial period, while large numbers of Indians traveled overseas as members of the Indian army and to work as police in colonial territories across Asia and Africa. These colonial displacements are essential to the later trajectory of Indian migrations, constituting an important beginning point for further migrations within and beyond the British Empire and Commonwealth, as well as providing the basis for the construction (and tensions) of shared identities as Indians overseas (for overviews of some of these colonial migrations and subsequent community histories, see Clarke et al. 1990; Rai and Reeves 2009).

Through their struggles for inclusion in postcolonial societies, demands for recognition, and political mobilization, the populations of what has come to be called the "old" diaspora have played an important part in shaping the contours of Indian identity in the world and at "home." Perhaps the most celebrated figure in the "old" diaspora, of course, is Mahatma Gandhi. "Arguably," Peter van der Veer writes, "Gandhi's stay in England and South Africa opened his eyes to the nationalist cause. He not only acquainted himself firsthand with the discriminatory treatment of Indians as 'British subjects' under South African racial laws, but also learned to see Indians as an ethnic group, a 'nation'" (1995:5). Gandhi's trajectory from overseas education, to colonial migration, to ultimate return to India and mobilization for national independence is hardly representative of the experiences of "overseas Indians" – most of whom made lives and formed communities overseas. However, Gandhi's journeys form an important historical touchstone for any consideration of India's diasporas in their relationship to the modern nations of South Asia, to notions of shared culture and identity, and to the possibility of an anthropology that could grasp this diversity in motion.

With Independence and the partition of India and Pakistan another series of migrations was set in motion that massively reshaped the contours of culture and belonging

on the subcontinent. Partition historiography has developed enormously since the 1990s and has been very influential within South Asian anthropology. Many scholars – especially those of Pakistan (see several essays in Bates 2001; Leonard 2007:56–83) – argue that the movements of Partition inaugurated a diasporic consciousness still integral to national imaginaries in South Asia. This “diasporic” origin of the ideas of India and Pakistan gives them their particular ambivalence and contradictoriness, and perhaps even results in a further tendency to self-exile and violent exclusions (see for India, e.g. Gupta 1993; Chakrabarty 2002; G. Ghosh 2002). Moreover, the local politics of migration and memory is essential to a fuller understanding of recent developments in Hindu nationalism (as addressed below).

The “new” diasporas of South Asians dating from the 1960s have been more examined by anthropologists of late, especially as they reflect particular changes in both national and global power structures of contemporary importance. The profile of South Asian migration was utterly transformed by changes in United States immigration policy in the mid-1960s, which abolished “national origin” quotas dating from 1924 and allowed South Asians to emigrate to the US in greatly increased numbers. The end of the “White Australia” policy in that country and similar changes in New Zealand spurred parallel migrations, particularly of privileged and educated Indians. Of equal importance has been the rise of the oil economies in the Gulf states during the 1970s, creating a new site of, usually temporary, labor migration for Indians and Pakistanis. Gulf-centered labor migrations from India were somewhat disrupted by the first Gulf War, while intensive labor recruitment in Bangladesh inaugurated flows of workers and remittances to and from the Gulf from particular parts of that country (for the latter, see Gardner 1995), in part replacing migrants from other parts of South Asia. Finally, the development of the global information technology industry since the 1980s has created new circuits of migration and on-migration linking Singapore, Australia, the United States, and India in a chain of temporary and permanent labor contracting (see Xiang 2007; Upadhyaya and Vasavi 2008).

Parallel with these movements outward from South Asia in the past four decades, decolonization spurred a wave of what scholars call “re-emigration” or “second migrations” of Indian communities from East Africa, Fiji and elsewhere in the former British Empire. African Indians often chose (or were able, due to colonial citizenships; or were constrained, as refugees) to migrate to Britain, Australia, or the United States rather than “back” to a notional “home” in India. Decolonization changed both the legal realities and imaginative horizons of Indian communities throughout the British Commonwealth – as well as Indian communities in other colonial empires (e.g. Indians in Dutch Surinam, many of whom have since migrated to the Netherlands). These re-emigrations are perhaps more significant for the Indian diaspora than Indian independence itself was – countries in which Indians had long been fully settled were winning a *national* independence in which other postcolonial subjects were often not fully included (see Tinker 1977; Kelly 2001). But this exodus, based on a racial exclusion of “Asians” as such, highlighted the precarious belonging of Indians in their host countries and perhaps impelled an imaginary identification with India as the ancestral homeland and ultimate guarantor of security, even as these diasporic subjects moved to Britain or Canada in preference to India (Raj 2003:175).

Since Independence, the Indian government had encouraged overseas Indians to accept citizenship in their host countries. Starting in the 1970s, India began to cultivate

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contacts with its newly prominent (and, not incidentally, affluent) diaspora. As with the patterns of migration themselves, the Government of India's involvement with its diaspora has been complex. India intervened diplomatically in crises in Uganda and Fiji in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as organizing an airlift of Indians from Kuwait during the first Gulf War (A. Ghosh 1989:75; Leonard 2002:228); the growth of institutions within the Indian government to represent India's diaspora has, however, been a very recent phenomenon.

As the Government of India reached out to its diaspora, granting privileges in obtaining visas, owning land, and other economic rights in India, the new classes of professional migrants to the West became known as PIOs or NRIs (Persons of Indian Origin, or Non-Resident Indians) and were offered a range of scattered government initiatives to encourage attachment to and investment in the "homeland." More recently, the Indian government unified these initiatives in a Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, and (as of 2006) established a new category of secondary citizenship for people who emigrated after Independence and who already hold citizenship elsewhere. This "Overseas Citizenship of India" is restricted to post-Independence emigrants, and is not available to Bangladeshis or Pakistanis. These restrictions effectively bar Indians of the "old" diaspora access to the benefits of a secondary citizenship, while fixing the boundaries of Partition as immutable, impassable frontiers of national identity (Roy 2008). Overseas citizenship of India comes without any voting rights, though it is advertised as "dual citizenship" (see Lal et al. 2006:87–89). Each of these many constituencies of overseas Indians continues, however, to play important political, economic, and cultural roles in the making of contemporary India.

DISCREPANT GEOGRAPHIES AND DIVERGENT TRAJECTORIES

Osella and Gardner (2004), introducing a collection of papers on migration within and beyond South Asia, stress the importance of located field studies to assess the causes, conditions and consequences of (international) migration both in and from South Asia. For the most part, their contributors locate their studies in very specific places in South Asia, and use ethnographic data as a means to measure in one place the costs and consequences of migration. Another ethnographic collection (Jacobsen and Kumar 2004) – also produced within European academic networks – takes a more "pan-Diaspora" approach, surveying the specificities of religious practice, cultural norms, and communal relations in equally specific locations in the diaspora; such as Hindu practices in Minnesota, "multicultural" Asian identities in Australia, or Trinidadian Hinduism and its spectrum of changes over time. The latter volume is specifically focused on religious traditions, and most of the contributors write of the "Hindu diaspora" (see Vertovec 2000).² Whether ethnographers choose to locate themselves somewhere in the diaspora or somewhere in South Asia, focusing either on the localization of practices in closely described places within the diaspora or on the localization of migration in specific places in South Asia, the result has been to emphasize discrepant geographies and divergent trajectories.

To take one example: Mirpur is a district in southeast Pakistan, in the "peripheral border region of Azad Kashmir," the highly militarized Pakistani portion of Kashmir (along the border with India, and part of a region over which India and Pakistan have

made countervailing claims since Independence). Rural, poor, and without easy access to either eastward migration or to participation in the public life of Pakistan, Mirpuris have opted in vast numbers to emigrate to Britain. "Well over half of the population of Mirpur, in Pakistan, now lives overseas, and as much as two-thirds of Britain's Pakistani population is drawn from Mirpur district itself," or from areas immediately adjacent to it (Ballard 2004:31). Ballard suggests that for the Mirpuri migrants he has extensively studied – and the point is repeated throughout the literature – remittances from overseas relatives, far from increasing the general standard of living in the place of origin, entrench the disconnection of the area from productive markets and the possibility of sustainable livelihoods. Meanwhile, Mirpuris in Britain generally do not have the educational attainments or social capital to become upwardly mobile at the same rates as other, more elite South Asian migrants. What is on the one hand a highly localized out-migration is on the other a specific integration into the geography of class in Britain. In either case, both halves of this process are resistant to broad claims about flows of remittances to Pakistan or integration of immigrants in Western countries.

Kerala, a state in South India, has similarly been transformed by remittances from laborers in the Gulf, ranging from construction workers, to women employed as domestic servants, to professionals working in medicine, finance, and publishing. Anthropologists have shown, however, that the impact of remittances is not uniform or even, benefits generally flowing along lines of established privilege (it takes a large investment to migrate to the Gulf to begin with) (Osella and Osella 2000:79), and, as sociologist Prema Kurien has documented, different patterns of investment and social change are discernible between sending communities within Kerala itself (Kurien 2002). The salience of specific mobilizations of money and relationships from particular places is thus highlighted, challenging the supposed homogeneity and uniform movement of globalization.

Similarly, mobilization of family resources, state investments in information technology industries in Hyderabad, and the existence of high numbers of previous professional emigrants to Australia and the United States all converge to produce a huge representation of workers from the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in the ranks of mobile information technology workers globally. As Xiang (2007:xvi) reports, "according to the state's finance and planning department, Andhra Pradesh was home to 23 percent of all Indian IT professionals worldwide by the end of the 1990s." Moreover, these migrants are not drawn equally from all strata of the Andhra population – the historically privileged and dominant Kamma and Reddy castes are overrepresented for they have the resources to mobilize for education and urban homes, while kin-networks and dowry restrict the mobility of those resources within confined circuits (Xiang 2007:32–33; it should be noted, however, that individual families still often make enormous sacrifices to achieve these ends).

The differing trajectories (individual and collective) emanating from these uneven geographies also reflect struggles to adapt to the shifting winds of the global economy and of national immigration policies. While the aforementioned Mirpuris have creatively adapted to the narrowing and tightening of both labor immigration and Commonwealth citizens' entitlements in British immigration policy – emphasizing transnational marriages and benefiting from family reunion policies (Ballard 1990:237–238) – many of the IT workers that Xiang follows on their routes between India,

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Australia, and the United States found themselves caught in restrictive labor contracts, subject to the limited provisions of US temporary visas, and ultimately back in India without the accumulation of material and symbolic capital they had hoped for from their overseas sojourn.

That is to say, neither the causes nor the effects of recent migrations from South Asia are uniform across different regions, suggesting that we need more robust theories of diaspora experience and the structuring of global and transnational spaces to comprehend these divergences. Meanwhile, ethnographies in sending communities, tracing the lives of returning migrants from overseas, challenge any notion that migrants are always displaced in their sojourns away, and really at home in the place from which they came. The pattern of affiliations with home and abroad do not so neatly map onto a geography of local belonging.

Jonathan Parry's fieldwork with migrants to Bhilai, a steel town in central India, tracing their networks of migration within and beyond India, underscores this point. Many migrant households, he notes, "maintain close ties not only with their villages of origin, but also with kin and co-villagers who have migrated elsewhere. ... Sometimes these networks cross national frontiers: some Bhilai families have operated in a 'globalised' labour market for several generations and have as many close kin in Bangkok or Bahrain as back home in Bhojpur" (Parry 2004:233).

Starting out in Bhilai, Parry follows his informant Jagannath back to his home village of Nilgaygaon, in Uttar Pradesh. Parry's description of Nilgaygaon, and the lines of connection that traversed it both economically and culturally, highlights the transformations of local cultural style and of global imagination that result from increased transnational labor mobility from India. In Nilgaygaon, Parry sees the proliferation of empty houses paid for by members of Jagannath's lineage who have migrated to Thailand. The original lineage homestead is now "mainly a holiday home and a temporary refuge for migrants," with 50 acres of land solely farmed by one relative who stayed behind, named Bhairav Chand, even though the lineage as a whole owns the land and the house. "In self-conscious opposition to his suave cosmopolitan brothers, Bhairav cultivates the 'localist' style of a gruff, *dhoti*-clad, tobacco-chewing country landlord. Affecting to speak only the broadest Bhojpuri dialect, he doubles as an exorcist of evil spirits, and swaggers about the village barking orders at his untouchable labourers and loudly deriding his effete Delhi brothers" (2004:236).

Not fixed quantities nor permanent identities, rural and cosmopolitan affiliations emerge here as "styles," defined in contradiction and complicity with each other. The experience of transnational migration, and its material traces in the village, are reflected in Bhairav's localism and petty dominance as much as in the migrants' own sense of disconnection and distant affiliation. "Returned Nilgaygaon migrants vociferously complained [that] rural life is hard to take when you have lived outside for long. ... Sojourners or settlers? the literature asks, but with reference to the place to which migrants *go*. Here, however, my overwhelming impression was that most now regard themselves as sojourners in the place from which they *came*" (Parry 2004:237). Indeed Parry's careful attention to detailed performances and expressions of a cultural imagination helps to underscore that one can be an emigrant at home and a localist abroad.

The idea of convergence both economic and cultural, heralded by promoters of globalization, has been criticized by anthropologists, who have not only illuminated the pertinence and persistence of locality and difference, but also argued that

globalization itself works by cultivating and heightening differences, unequally connecting different parts of the world and entrenching disconnection and disjuncture as it reaches into the heart of local economies. The most striking evidence of transnationality might be an elaborate but empty house, or a more vigorous and even violent practice of identities newly identified as local, authentic, and therefore abstract and immutable. Transnationality is lived and experienced throughout South Asia in ways that ideal images of transnational convergence, or economic calculations of monetary flows, cannot fully comprehend.

NATIONALISM IN EXILE

The groups of the South Asian diaspora do not share a language, a religion, or a unified homeland. What, then, constitutes their relationship to their countries of origin? How do diaspora populations see – and create for themselves – their homeland from abroad? Some time ago Amitav Ghosh pointed out that “we are sometimes told that the ‘real’ bond between India and its diaspora lies in the ‘immemorial realities’ of caste and kinship.” Yet he doubted the self-sufficiency of such “realities” in the face of distance: “If this argument has any merit at all it would only be for those groups of migrant Indians who regularly went back to India to marry” (1989:75). In place of the various attempts to secure a singular relation of descent or alliance between India and “her” diaspora, Ghosh insisted, rather, that the relation was multiple, “epic,” and “lived in the imagination.” “It is because this relationship is so much a relationship of the imagination that the specialists of the imagination – writers – play so important a part in it” (1989:76).

Ghosh’s insight was – and is – congruent with the growing anthropological emphasis on forms of social imagination, and the media, technologies, and memorializations that foster particular visions of community. The “work of the imagination” (Appadurai 1996) – as opposed to, but not less than, the supposedly more fateful workings of economics and genealogy – has come to take a central place in contemporary understandings of the Indian diaspora and its relation to the “idea of India.” The constitution of an idea of India abroad, however, risks abstraction from the demands of locality and place. Long-distance nationalism of this sort, Benedict Anderson argues, can increase the virulence of nationalist ideologies and associated practices of violent exclusion.

For Anderson the imagination of the nation constitutes, in some respects, a “project for coming home from exile” by defining one, immutable, unitary space that can encompass a widely dispersed collective, and provide a place of return for the furthest flung migrants (1994:319). Anderson is critical of the abstraction that this can foster, while recognizing the immense, even revolutionary potential of such solidarity across place and difference. However, if the project of nationalism itself requires abstraction from lived realities in place, knitting together disparate locations and life-experiences into a singular narrative of the nation, the phenomenon of long-distance nationalism only compounds that effect. The study of “émigré nationalisms” as a class of phenomena is especially urgent because of the recent history of diaspora influence on and funding for violent campaigns in India against minorities identified as non-Hindu, and therefore out of place in the (imagined) unity of the nation.

Bhatt and Mukta, and their contributors, writing from various locations in the West and focusing on the transnational dynamics of Hindu nationalism, have emphasized how “processes of discrimination or minority status in the West become translated in religious and ethnic terms to create new languages of majorities and minorities that are articulated as coherent ideologies of religious or ethnic nationalism and then have repercussions on the countries of origin themselves” (2000:409). That is, they argue that one of the factors influencing the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s was a rewriting of diaspora experiences – of becoming “Indian” and “Hindu” in particular contexts where that was the most salient difference from the host society – back onto the idea of India as a nation. Rajagopal stipulates that it “would be a mistake ... to assume that the meaning and implications of nationalist expression abroad are continuous with those at home,” and that an “unacknowledged politics of location operates” between the two strains of nationalism (2000:468, 469). Thus, while claiming a political and social identity as a “Hindu” in the context of US religious multiculturalism can serve as a ratifying mark of difference, the means of belonging both with other Indians and in the politics of multiculturalism (2000:471), in India it can serve as an exclusionary claim specifically oriented against the Muslim minority. The well-documented links between political organizations in India and religious and cultural missions abroad can be seen to build upon, and exploit, this unacknowledged difference.

The ritual and doctrinal innovations of Hinduism abroad, driven by “missionary” organizations with deep roots in the diaspora like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, have tended in the direction of a simplification, and an emphasis on communal rituals, which enable claims of a universal Hindu belonging transcending location and internal divisions of caste, community, language, and interpretation (van der Veer 1996:230–237). Thus, within India itself, the construction of a threatened Hindu identity and the projection of an imagined “internal enemy” in the figure of the Muslim (which are complex processes with many contributing cultural and political factors) have joined with this simplified Hinduism to fuel the notion of “Hindutva” or “Hinduness” as the essential characteristic of the Indian nation. Drawing entirely on work within India, Hansen has said that “nowhere in my field work did I find any indications that Hindutva meant anything but assertion of an extremely fuzzy Hinduness vis-à-vis a phantasmagoric construction of a Muslim threat” (1999:194–195).³

While the politics of Hindutva are not solely attributable to the processes of diaspora “ethnicization,” these transnational exchanges of meaning have tangible local effects in India. The abstraction of Hinduism from its divergent local practices and its deployment as the foundation of Indian national identity and belonging spurred massive and violent purges against local Muslim populations in Gujarat in 2002 and the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a mosque in Ayodhya, in 1992 (as well as countrywide riots). The durable consequences of this violence are visible today in the increasing spatial separation, and entrenched marginalization, of Muslims within Indian politics and economy, while fear of “reprisals” from Muslim criminal organizations in Mumbai (following on the 1993 bombings in that city) have led to an increased militarization of urban space in India, police violence, and pained questioning about the value of secularism and diversity. Even though the idea of Hindutva, or “Hinduness,” as the cultural foundation of the Indian nation has been fostered in diaspora experiences of

discrimination, and support for Hindu nationalist organizations in India is drawn from around the diaspora, the costs within India in violence and in the wider effects on the political body are not paid by these long-distance nationalists.

TRANSNATIONAL PUBLICS

India – in its broadest sense – has always been shaped by pilgrimages, migrations, and invasions, and various sacred and secular imaginings of the space of the nation have long contended against each other (van der Veer 1996:106–128). The development of broad overseas communities of South Asians continues this rich tradition, and promises tangible benefits to India and the other countries of South Asia. Further, anthropological work on the transnational extent of South Asian communities suggests that the work of the imagination through which connections across those communities are maintained can further cultivate the diversity of South Asian belongings. Particular studies underscore that South Asians abroad are maintaining plural, variegated, and epic relationships with each other and with multiple nations.

Anthropological studies of Indian communities abroad were, formerly, dominated by categories of “overseas Indians” that drew from colonial and national era definitions and delimitations of culture, belonging, and identity – an imagination that fixed cultural identity to a point of origin, which might bear little relationship to one’s own identification of “home.” After the critique of such static and located notions of culture, the field was revived in the 1990s as anthropologists turned their attention to transnationality, diasporas, and cultural globalization and hybridity. Though the idea of “transnationality” is understood differently by various scholars, it can offer a specific avenue to theorizing the tangible cultural innovations – for good and for ill – that come with increased global connection. Some of the work surveyed here considers ethnic identities and their political mobilization beyond national boundaries (linking up with the concerns of scholars of émigré nationalisms). Some scholars address the impact of mobility on our understandings and management of diversity within plural societies, primarily in the West. Others consider transnational reformulations of more everyday practices and experiences like aging and – in its broadest sense – belonging. These anthropological approaches to transnational communities and identities share a concern with the meaning and social life which is made within the currents of contemporary migrations, and resist the abstractions and simplifications of the sort examined above.

Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) theoretical work has been centrally important in defining “transnationality” and “cultural globalization” as topics of study in anthropology. Responding primarily to economists and political scientists, who on the one hand promoted globalization as economic convergence and, on the other, retailed fears about “primordial” ethnic conflicts “reappearing,” Appadurai encouraged attention to the ways in which disjunctures in cultural and economic opportunities and conjunctures between uneven “scapes” of finance, ethnicity, and media drove the formation of *new* transnational ethnic claims. He wrote, primarily, against the automaticity and inevitability implied by dominant understandings of global convergence and ethnic or civilizational clashes. Meanwhile his, and his colleagues’, work on the journal *Public Culture* established new means of theorizing culture in translation and

exchange across boundaries. Though this work is often taken to insist on the instability of borders and the fragility of belonging, the strongest result has been to train attention on the tangible (and sometimes terrible) innovations and concrete effects of culture in the present (on the Hindu right and the Bombay riots of 1993, see Appadurai 2000).

Peter van der Veer's (1995) relatively early collection of ethnographic and historical work in the revived study of the Indian diaspora likewise stressed the paradoxical interdependence of belonging and migration, with detailed and specific reference to the contours and history of South Asian migrations. Including important studies of transnational links between India and the diaspora that span the conventional division between "old" and "new" diasporas (especially John Kelly's article on new Hindu missions to the "old" diaspora in Fiji), the volume both connects back to previous studies of overseas Indians and prefigures important trends in the more recent study of diasporic Indians in the West. Verne Dusenbery's (1995) article on the Sikh diaspora, for instance, indicates that the diasporic development of demands for a Sikh homeland in the Punjab might be more directly related to the politics of recognition in multicultural, liberal societies like Canada and the United States than to any "primordial" sense of common belonging in a specific place. This point is echoed in Rajogopal's (2000) study of Hindu nationalism in the US and has been pursued in more recent accounts of the differential incorporation of Indian groups – Sikhs, Punjabis, Pakistanis – into British and American society (Axel 2001; Raj 2003).

These latter studies, attentive to local political and cultural realities and stressing the travails of liberal recognition, further demonstrate that the "new" migrants to Britain and the United States have been instrumental in domestic reformulations of citizenship, ethnicity, and belonging in those countries (Shukla 2003; Hall 2002). In the United States, South Asians have been cast as a "model minority" (Prashad 2000), as well as constituting a large community of diasporic intellectuals who work to influence academic and political conceptions of India, its place in the world, and Indians' place in the American political community (Assayag and Bénéï 2003). In Britain, South Asians have been key players in reshaping notions of "Englishness" (Baucom 1999) as well as constituting a core constituency for new configurations of labor, race, and "blackness." Shukla (2003:chs. 2–3) pursues a historical comparison between Indian communities in New York and London that highlights these divergent historical experiences of integration.

Pnina Werbner's (2002) study of Pakistanis in the British city of Manchester joins a recent current of work careful to separate out everyday life and the work of community building in diaspora from the experiences of cosmopolitan intellectuals and expatriate entrepreneurs – the high-value migrants Indians at home and abroad alike proudly claim as representatives of the diaspora as a whole (e.g. Lal et al. 2006). Werbner makes a distinction between "cosmopolitan" and "transnational" public spheres. For her, transnational public spheres remain highly localized within immigrant neighborhoods and enclaves, and are conducted in a language and with cultural meanings often "foreign" to the host society but shared across national borders. Transnationalism, in this sense, directs our attention to the many ways of fostering a sense of moral community within and between groups at home and abroad. Through the maintenance of such transnational spheres alongside engagement in national-level politics a different kind of belonging – less exclusive, more negotiated

and felt-out – may be sustained across both country of origin and country of residence. This is what Vertovec (2007) calls “bifocality” and characterizes as an increasingly available option for diasporic populations. This is, of course, not an entirely novel phenomenon in immigrant cultures, yet the cultural space and practice of transnationality may enable diasporic peoples to affiliate with *both* of their “home” societies, so to speak – constituting “nations of emigrants” (in Susan Coutin’s elegant phrase).

Karen Isaksen Leonard (2007) has conducted a long-term study of emigrants from Hyderabad (in India) to seven other locations of post-Independence settlement, including Pakistan, the United Kingdom, the Persian Gulf, the United States, and several countries of the British Commonwealth. She takes up Werbner’s distinction between cosmopolitan and transnational formations, and concludes that Hyderabadis abroad have formed an urban-centered, English-speaking, cosmopolitan grouping, and moreover one deeply affected by local legal regimes, and even “national symbols or rituals” of integration in each country of settlement (2007:276, see 266–267). Her ethnographic focus, however, constantly returns to practices of distinction revolving around the old elite Urdu-speaking culture of Hyderabad. While the second generation threatens to disappear into wider cultural identifications fostered by the recent histories of national integration – particularly in Pakistan – Hyderabadi groups throughout the world struggle to maintain some contact with the old culture, if only through culinary traditions (Hyderabadi cuisine, like food traditions for many migrants, is an important medium of memory and community – see Ray 2004). However cosmopolitan or locally rooted in countries of settlement this diaspora population may be, Leonard’s focus on the everyday practices and media of group identity as opposed to normative claims (of either assimilation or the community’s essential difference) underscores the ethnographic salience of the transnational in Werbner’s sense.

Sarah Lamb’s ethnography of aging and care for elders in the transnational space produced by affluent Bengalis’ migrations likewise focuses on the everyday, and on effortful maintenance of connection across borders. Her interlocutors express sharp criticisms of the norms and values associated with transnationality in the wider, cosmopolitan and Western-oriented sense. More particularly, she several times cites the elders’ sense that they are missing something by not being able to share food and time with their extended families. Her informant Sri Ramesh Sinha, for instance, describes his life in an old age home near Calcutta: “Here we get tea, food, everything we need ... But how much better would it be even to get tea from a *barir lok* (someone at home)? – maybe a grandchild, who would say, ‘Here, *dadu* (grandfather), I’ve had this half cup of tea, and now half is left – will you drink it?’” (Lamb 2009:156).

Lamb comments, “in a good Indian family, one may possibly receive less materially – perhaps only a half cup rather than a full cup of tea – but whatever there is will be offered by and shared with close kin, expressing and forging love, or *maya*.” The theory of connection and of love here is one grounded in Bengali notions of flow, exchange, and sharing which are distinct from – and usefully antagonistic to – the cosmopolitan or transnational ideal of an endless circuit of freely convertible goods, labor, and identities. No less dynamic, and certainly not static or fixed, these Bengali representations of mutual sharing and flow between persons – albeit tinged with nostalgia for a lost world of presence – might allow us to theorize transnationality in more embodied and more interpersonal ways (see Lamb, chapter 27 in this volume).

CONCLUSION: FLOWS AND ENCOUNTERS

The expansion of the cultural space of South Asia has had dramatic results in cities and towns on the subcontinent and in the image of South Asian identities promulgated in popular culture.⁴ Film scholars in contemporary India have, perhaps, been among the most sensitive to these changes, as they have witnessed the shift in Hindi films to cater to new imaginations of global connection while retaining a sense of – and assuaging cultural anxieties about – “Indianness” (Mazumdar 2008:404). Noting the increasing prominence of heroes in Hindi films who represent the Indian diaspora – particularly the post-1965 diaspora of professionals to the US – Madhava Prasad writes that new films highlighting overseas Indians “have relocated what we might call the seismic centre of Indian national identity [to] somewhere in Anglo-America.” “In other words,” he continues, these cultural productions have “brought the NRI decisively into the centre of the picture, as a more stable figure of Indian identity than anything that can be found indigenously” (Prasad 2003).

There is an important insight here, one that relates not only to Indians’ self-understanding as Indians but also to the formations of culture, and the circuits of media, that influence perceptions of other South Asians in diaspora and their own relationship to a shared idea of regional culture. There is no doubt that the culture heroes and prominent public figures in India increasingly include the successful IT worker with an American visa (Xiang 2007), the transnational entrepreneur like Lakshmi Narayan Mittal – able to achieve feats of international merger in which an “Indian” firm (though listed on the London stock exchange) takes over a leading European steel producer (Reeves 2009) – and the ABCD (or American-born confused *desi*, the child of emigrants whose knowledge of India must be learned, and is never fully embodied). Whether or not such images now occupy the “seismic center” of Indian identity is more open to question, perhaps, but the point implies a certain methodological urgency to tracing the effects of diaspora – its tremors and shocks – within South Asian countries themselves *and* in the contemporary diasporic locations of South Asian cultures.

Further, the connections and circulations between South Asia and its many diasporas do not solely include images and projections of an imagined elsewhere – whether that elsewhere is India seen from New York, Pakistan seen from London, or America seen from Delhi or London from Karachi. As Werbner notes, there are multiple “diasporic imaginations” in play in any community, and the diaspora of cultural products – which includes Bollywood films, among other media – is only one of the many strands that constitute “an aesthetic world embodied by the flow of mass popular cultural products from the subcontinent, and by a nostalgic reinscription in ritual and ceremonial of the pungent tastes and smells, the vivid colours and moving musical lyrics of a lost land” (2002:12).

Anthropologies of the South Asian diaspora are fundamentally about transnational belonging and cultures that are transcribed, translated, and transformed as they move. Most of these studies, however, are ethnographies, and that shared methodological base delivers particular insights of theoretical importance. The studies surveyed here are either explicitly or implicitly shaped by locations in specific diasporic sites, by local political consequences and involvements, and by the practice of fieldwork. These studies engage directly with South Asian peoples and cultures throughout the world, and

the ways in which their imagined and real connections with a point of origin, a homeland, and a "shared" culture affect the experience of migration, assimilation in a home country, and the possibilities of imagining "India" differently, or at all. They also, however, demonstrate that South Asian cultures are "abroad" in a very real sense – not fixed or confined to one territory, nation, or region. Ethnographic investigation, from highly particular locations, can thus apprehend "siting strategies" and "nodal points" (Haller 2005:170–171), lateral connections and conjunctures between movements, and currents and flows – potentially dangerous but variously bounded, managed, and made meaningful – amidst this apparently restless movement. As the anthropology of India reminds us constantly, every boundary is porous and every particular body is shaped by the people, matter, and ideas that traverse it and render it multiple.

NOTES

- 1 Indian, Pakistani, and Sikh are not, of course, perfectly parallel identities, and like most such identifications they overlap. Managing the boundaries between national, nation-state, and religious, ethnic, or other community based identities is precisely the problem confronted by diaspora groups, hyphenated citizens, and others who are representative of transnational and global processes, and prime examples of the limits and future possibilities of anthropological theorizing. Specific studies can unravel these complexities in more detail than is possible here. See, for instance, Axel (2001), who examines both historical and contemporary Sikh diasporic formations, and offers a great deal of theoretical problematization; and Raj (2003:184–210), who focuses on the constraining categories of liberal recognition, stressing their poor fit with lived identifications of religion, ethnicity, and national origin.
- 2 The "Hindu diaspora" is a particularly common notion among European scholars, but as a description it is sociologically quite modest – referring to the global distribution of practices broadly associated with Hinduism, and not necessarily implying an overarching identity or shared religious ideology. American scholars of the diaspora tend to pay less attention to the practice of religion and its transformations and to emphasize religion rather as a political or ethnic identity. Each emphasis brings into view quite different social issues and relations.
- 3 John Kelly (1995) provides an interesting and contrasting example to this emphasis on ethnonationalist mobilization of Hinduism, in his interpretation of Indo-Fijian receptiveness to reformist strains of Hinduism as a *depoliticization* of communal belonging, a removal from engagement in a political context dominated by ethnic Fijians.
- 4 Veronique Dupont (2005) argues that urban redevelopment in Delhi is increasingly creating a city that mirrors the transnational norms of privatized and defensible space familiar from California suburbs and gated communities. Dupont emphasizes the insistent projection of an imagined American elsewhere in the advertising and promotion of the new urban developments, both to attract diasporic investment – as second or vacation homes "at home" – and to accord with the new imaginary of a transnational, affluent, consuming Indian. Thus the diaspora comes home.

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