

**‘For the sake of family and future’:
linked lives of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom**

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Introduction

International labour migration from developing to the developed countries continues to be both a major cause and consequence of today’s globalised world. The European Union (EU), being one of the promoters of free movement of labour, also increasingly invites highly skilled people from third countries. India is one of the largest pools of high-skilled labour force in the world (Sasikumar and Hussian, 2008) with a total of 25 million Indians settled overseas (Government of India, 2011). Migration of an individual, however, should not be regarded as an isolated act of movement. To better understand the processes underlying highly skilled migration, it should be viewed as a continuation of an integral system of previous and future life events which is surrounded by and surrounding other individuals. By adopting a qualitative approach to life course framework, this paper focuses on the life course patterns of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom which are brought about by their significant others and which often inform their further migration decisions.

Theoretical background

The life course framework views the development of life paths of individuals over time and in social processes (Elder and Giele, 2009). It facilitates ‘an ecological understanding of people at the nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change’ (Daaleman and Elder, 2007, p 87). Elder (1994) uses the term ‘linked lives’ to refer to the interaction with and interdependence on social relationships, and thus to recognise the role of others in forming the life trajectories and transitions of an individual. In this line of reasoning, Bailey *et al.* (2004) examine how dual-earner couples make relocation decisions in the context of the linkages to their children and parents. Furthermore, Mulder and Cooke (2009) call for research on family and residential relocation which would take one step further from the focus on the nuclear family and explore the relocation links with the extended family outside the household.

This paper seeks to find answer to how do the linked lives shape the life course of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom? Who are the main significant others in the lives of those highly skilled migrants? What are the implications for their migration paths?

Methodological approach and research participants

We adopted qualitative methods to get detailed accounts of the life courses of highly skilled migrants from the micro perspective. Specifically, biographic approach assists in organising such accounts (Bailey, 2009) and prioritises the social embeddedness of individuals (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993), thereby allowing for an understanding of the crucial ways significant others influence the life courses of highly skilled migrants which is the focus of this paper.

Our results are based on interviews with 47 highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom. The first part of the interview draws from the biographic-narrative interview method (BNIM) (see Wengraf, 2001) whereby the participant was asked to tell his or her life story in order to reveal the life events and experiences to which the participant attaches the most value. Later the narrated biography was discussed in more detail and, if necessary, additional topics were raised by the interviewer to cover the interview themes of education, employment, migration and household paths as well as the role of significant others in shaping these paths. The interview transcriptions are inductively analysed by creating codes, categories and themes with the aid of qualitative software MAXQDA.

The interviews are supplemented by a novel life course visualisation method to illustrate the importance of linked lives in the decisions regarding the major life events and in altering the life course as a whole (see Figure 1).

The research participants were sought among Indian migrants working in a professional sector job, aged 25-40, who are preferably holders of a knowledge migrant visa (the Netherlands) or a Highly Skilled Migrant Programme or Tier 1 or Tier 2 visa (the UK), and who have lived or intend to live in the respective country at least one year. The recruitment sites were Amsterdam, Eindhoven and Groningen in the Netherlands, and London and Southampton in the United Kingdom as to provide a broad picture of Indian professionals in both countries in geographical terms. 36 participants are male and 11 female; 23 of them are married and another 11 engaged or in a relationship. The majority of the participants work in the sectors of IT services, industry, education and research.

Preliminary findings: linked lives and the life course

The role of parents/extended family

The vast majority of participants suggested that parents in particular but the extended families (i.e., uncles and aunts and their spouses, and grandparents) in general have had a direct say on their major life decisions or will indirectly shape their future behaviour in all four life trajectories—education, employment, migration, household—examined in this study.

Regarding the main interest of this paper, namely, unravelling the linked lives in the context of migration, there are two main types of migration to be distinguished with regard to the parents. The first category is temporary migration of the parents of the highly skilled migrants to help to raise their (newborn) grandchildren. This type of migration takes place both internally in India and internationally to the current country of residence of their own children, and increasingly stems from the changing gender roles:

'I decided Okay, now I'll look for a job to support my family and my husband. Because my husband is the, he's the only son, he's got two sisters and he has to support his parents and his grandparents, it was a joint family. So... I started working, my mother-in-law came over to help take care of the baby.' (female, 33, UK)

The second pattern is return migration of the highly skilled due to the 'time to look after parents' in their older ages:

'I want to be with my parents. We have a system of, family system. Which I've not seen here. There is an attachment but there is no... close attachment. I cannot imagine my parents at the age of 70s and 60s, walking on their road alone, buying their food alone. It's impossible.' (male, 30, the Netherlands)

Hence the cultural norm of the (extended) family being actively involved predetermines the educational and marital choices to a large extent, whereas the different stages in the care-giving cycle reveal interesting cultural schemas regarding age-role behaviour and often can trigger the migration of and to the parents.

The role of spouse/partner

Being in a relationship with or married to a highly skilled migrant almost inevitably implies migration. Just a few research participants had migrated together or at the same time but to different countries with their spouse or partner for education or employment purposes. However, for most of the cases the participants or their spouse or partner had to leave their job in India or other country of previous residence for the family reunion in the UK or the Netherlands. In this situation, all participants considered it crucial to secure relevant employment or (post-)graduate education for their spouse or partner. The same was the case when planning on return migration to India:

'I don't want her... to become the housewife. I also want her to... engage in some sort of work she's interested in. And so I applied [for a job] in Bangalore, I applied in Hyderabad, and I applied in... Delhi, I applied in Bombay. I applied in all these... you know, A-class cities, metropolitan cities, that's what you call. Where she can also have some opportunity, I can also have some opportunity, so both of us can make a good family.' (male, 28, UK)

However, if the desired employment opportunities were unavailable in the same city, several participants either commuted longer distances in order to cohabit with the spouse or partner on a daily basis, and a few had opted for being a 'weekend couple'. Also, some (formerly) single participants mentioned the plan to return to India in order to find a spouse there or let the parents arrange the marriage.

The links between the lives of the couples can thus bring about a variety of migration accounts and these accounts depend largely on the employment or education trajectories of both partners.

The role of children

Whereas the birth of a child significantly changes the lives of the parents in general, we will sketch in this section only the main practices how they alter their parents' migration paths.

Whereas for spouse migration the other key trajectory was that of employment, in case of children it is of education. The decision to move or stay depends on whether the parents have evaluated the Dutch/British or Indian education system better and also on whether the parents would like to raise their children in Indian cultural environment or in Western society. Children's education may often also trigger internal migration, for example, to ensure admission to a reputed school based on residential location.

'I would like to educate my children, my next generation in India. For sure. At least their basic education they get in India. That is for sure. The education, the initial, primary, secondary, higher secondary education, it's much, much, much better in India. I personally think so.' (male, 29, the Netherlands)

In a longer run, some parents consider staying in the country of current residence for the number of years required for permanent residency so that, when returning to India with young children, they will later have financial benefits entering the higher education system in a European country:

'[After obtaining permanent residency] it will be easier for my daughter to come back to UK university without paying huge fees.' (female, 34, UK)

The role of social networks

Many participants reported that their friends, fellow students, professors, and colleagues have directly or indirectly guided them to the path of high-skilled migration by providing information on or sharing know-how in the place of destination and its education and employment opportunities. Some participants indicated that professional networks are fully instrumental, without these contacts and their local information it would have been impossible to enter the labour market.

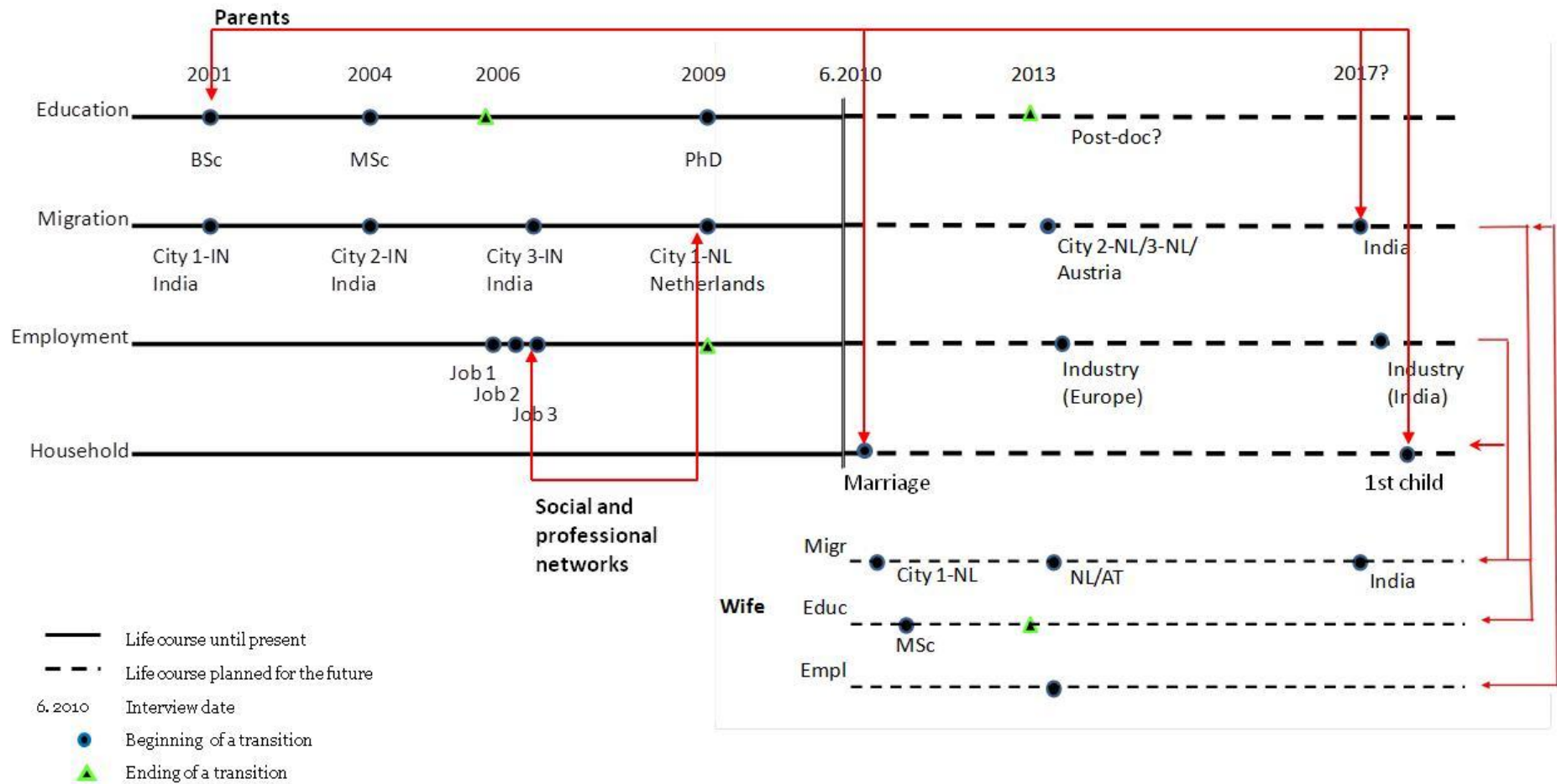
Apart from by means of distributing information, social networks can set off migration simply by creating a norm of their own behaviour and experiences. As one of the participants notes: *'I can't think of anyone who doesn't have an MSc or MBA from abroad'* (male, 29, UK).

Visualisation of life course and linked lives

Figure 1 depicts the life course in terms of education, migration, employment and household trajectories of a highly skilled Indian migrant (male, 26, the Netherlands). The figure also points out the events where the significant others are inevitably considered in the decision making or where the notion of linked lives has altered or will alter the life course in a remarkably different direction. His former fellow students invited him to work in their company, so he moved to another city in India. When he decided to apply for a PhD, his former professor advised him a Dutch university where he had established good collaboration contacts. Also, his friend from the Indian college was already enrolled in the same PhD programme and could give him information on the department and the Netherlands based on his own experiences. After getting married and finishing postgraduate studies, his place of residence will also depend on where his wife will find a satisfying job. Finally, he wants to return to India after some years to be among his parents and extended family again who would also help to raise the child he plans to have by the time.

This example illustrates how only by nesting individuals within the contexts of the people in their lives (Moen and Hernandez, 2009), we are able to fully comprehend the complexities of the processes underlying knowledge migration. This paper will elaborate on these connections of linked lives in order to contribute to an integral understanding of the migration of the highly skilled.

Figure 1 Life course trajectories of a highly skilled Indian migrant (male, 26, the Netherlands) and the role of linked lives



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