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Diasporas transforming homelands: Nuancing ‘collective remittance’ practices in a western Indian village

By Sudeep Basu

Abstract

Diasporic communities that advance their ancestral homelands through forging links with it can be best examined in the context of the history of migration of these communities and the culture of developing stakes in the homeland through material and emotional investments of various kinds. While globalization of migration has facilitated diasporas of various kinds, there has been a marked turn of gaze towards the homeland by diasporic members. What ties the emigrant/diasporics with the places of origin are collective meso-structures of village communities/associations and hometown networks which integrate and manage the changes induced by migration, in maintaining and constructing boundaries, villages spaces, resources, hierarchies, norms and practices. While migration encompasses a whole range of social, political and economic factors, the focus of this study in a village in North Gujarat, western India is not on why people migrate nor on why people give but rather on the effects and meanings that migration and collective remittances would hold for individuals or groups in ‘places of origin’. This search for meanings would entail an understanding of the values, structures and expectations that inhere in acts of giving. While reconstructing the local community’s reception of the emergent dual character of diasporic giving, which is, charitable ‘sacred’ giving – the Indian equivalent of ‘dan’ on the one hand and ‘non-sacred’ giving - towards development works in a village setting on the other, what impingements they may have on local development processes and on the formation of ‘village collectives’ will be further interrogated.

Keywords: Collective remittances; Diaspora Philanthropy; Dan; Social Transformation; Village Collectives

1. Introduction

Diasporic communities that advance their ancestral homelands through forging links with it can be best shown in the context of the history of migration of these communities and the culture of developing stakes in the homeland through material and emotional investments of various kinds. Notwithstanding the span and stretch of the Indian diaspora, it is only recently that this entity has received policy attention in India. Relatively recent moves by the Indian government to upgrade the Indian diaspora on its list of foreign policy priorities are seen in response to the contours and compulsions of international geopolitics. The Indian government mounted a major initiative to build closer links with the Indian diaspora culminating in the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January 2003 (Government of India 2002). Every kind of diasporic Indian group has its own particular relationship with India or homeland which builds upon and complicates the complexity of the diasporic experience as a whole (Sidel 2004: 220). The differing affiliations of Indian diasporic communities and their practices of ‘giving back’ to the homeland have a role in transforming the lives of co-ethnics back home. The complex and diverse affiliations are important in the context of philanthropic practices of the Indian diaspora because they yield considerable influence over the “allocation of individual or collective philanthropic resources back to their country of origin” (Merz, Chen and Geithner 2007: 3). There is growing debate among scholars and students of the field about the impact of diaspora transfers on poverty, development, and equity in home countries. There is also growing interest in the potential to increase both the quantity and impact of ‘diaspora giving’ targeted at effective social change. Many countries are recognizing the potential of their diasporas to contribute to their nations’ economic and social development through a range of contributions, including financial investment, political advocacy, and philanthropic giving (Kapur 2004; Khadria 2008). Such countries have established policies to cultivate ties with their diaspora communities and to encourage both economic and social investment. Aid agencies and global financial institutions are also encouraging such investments, and a growing number of non-profit organizations are offering expertise and infrastructure to support them. At the same time,

there is growing global appreciation for the unique and potent roles of both the nonprofit sector and private forms of giving (Tandon 2000; Shah 1998).

This study seeks to examine the specific contributions of the Gujarati diaspora to its homeland; given its complex migration history and the inherited cultural practices of philanthropy among Non- resident Gujaratis (NRGs). The NRGs' contributions to the development of their state provides a diagnostic marker to map the scope, scale and impact of these practices of 'giving' to the homeland, epitomized through various charitable works undertaken by NRGs belonging to different castes, religion and creed. The major forms of charity/donations other than the remittances/gifts at individual family levels, consist of contributions that are set aside for social causes, such as community based amenities for drinking water, roads, institutional support for health and education etc., aid during disasters and conflicts, besides support for building religious sites, crematorium, organizing religious festivals, feeding the poor, providing scholarships to a local school, and entertainment etc. This study attempts to analyze these migration flows – through collective remittances, apart from remittances to individual households as one of the ways by which emigrants keep helping their local communities or places of origin. It explores the meanings and expectations that inhere in 'practices of giving' at a distance, since unlike the Mexican case (Cohen 2001; Massey and Parrado 1994), the social and physical distance between international migrants and their co-ethnics back home is far greater, the impact of time and space on relations between co-ethnics and communities across borders will thereby differ.

While migration is enmeshed in a whole range of social, political and economic factors, the focus of this study is not on why people migrate but rather on the effects and meanings that migration has on origin sites. What ties the emigrant/diasporics with the places of origin are collective meso-structures of village communities/associations and hometown networks which integrate and manage the changes induced by migration, in maintaining and constructing boundaries, villages spaces, resources, hierarchies, norms and practices. While reconstructing the local reception of the emergent practices of giving, principally that of, charitable giving – the Indian equivalent of 'dan' vis-a-vis

philanthropic giving, the secular version, towards development works in a village setting, what impingements they may have on local development processes in place of origin will be interrogated.

The study would address the following questions and concerns:

- Analyze the effects or consequences of the diasporic giving practices in a village setting in western India. Implications in terms of inter-community relations, institutions and sources of investment.
- Document the practices of ‘collective remittances’, forms of donations, charitable works.
- Interrogate the dual nature of collective giving – dan – religious/sacred version vis-à-vis non-sacred (secular) version – for development works in a village setting as well as adhoc vis-à-vis strategically planned forms of giving.
- What are the power and symbolic negotiations taking place between remittances senders and receivers/migrants and non-migrants and between receivers and non-receivers?
- How do we come to understand ‘village collectives’, and networks as poles of identification for migrants and non-migrants alike? where does a village start and end when some of its community members are abroad?
- Revisiting the notion of collective remittances, its uses and heuristics in apprehending stratification, village prosperity, social inequality and change.

2. Of collective remittances in societies

Within the transformative processes of ‘migrant transnationalism’ (Glick-Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton-Blanc 1992), we can begin to understand ‘remittances’

which are the core of almost of every migrant journey. Remittances have meaning and implications beyond their financial value and are associated with powerful emotions of debt and gratitude; expectation and obligation; pride, shame and aspiration¹. In remittance exchanges, both migrants and non-migrants are seen to enact some aspects of their lives simultaneously, though not equally, in multiple settings. Till date much of the literature on migration has focused on the migrant – host relationship, stemming in part from the predominance of the ‘statist’ paradigm in the study of ‘migration orders’ corresponding with the ‘nation-state container theory of society’ (Beck 2000). This line of thinking has had the tendency to neglect migrants’ ties to their homeland nurtured not only through idea of the ‘myth of return’ but also through concrete links with the homeland. Few studies have grappled with the transformative possibilities of migrant’s practices in terms of collective remittances flowing into ‘places of origin’ – rural societies.

Collective remittances (also called communal remittances) are monies or material transfers sent by diaspora groups such as migrant associations, religious groups to their home communities. Unlike household or individual remittances, collective remittances are typically intended for community infrastructure, other local development initiatives, or the construction or improvement of religious structures (see Vargas-Lundius, 2004). Collective remittances can best be described as diaspora charity or philanthropy. Though collective remittances are almost negligible in volume relative to overall migrant remittances, they may be critical to the recipient community and the society as a whole. Regrettably there has been a general absence of reliable and systematic data relating to the contribution of the Diaspora towards their homeland in collective terms. There is eloquent testimony to the generous impulses that abound in the Diaspora. The task therefore is to simply document the contributions made by committed NRGs in terms of material and non-material benefits extended by them towards the development of their region of origin.

“Diaspora philanthropy” as a form of collective remittance is a relatively new term with many variations, include homeland philanthropy, migrant philanthropy, and transnational giving (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004). It has several fundamental elements. They

include: (1) charitable giving from individuals or groups who reside outside their homeland, who (2) maintain a sense of identity with their home country, (3) give to causes or organizations in that country, and (4) give for public benefit. “Collective remittances” have recently drawn attention not because of their amounts alone, although they are difficult to calculate because of the “informality” behind some of these initiatives, but rather, because of the socio-political, historical and economic dimensions entailed in group interactions across borders which characterize the “bundle” associated with these remittances. What distinguishes these projects is that it is for the collective good they provide. In addition to involving collective fundraising, they imply collective enjoyment and not private gain. The outputs from collective remittances are seemingly more objectified, visible, durable, consumable by a wider net of people, and imbued with symbolism.

While the literature on the economics of remittance behaviour considers purely ‘fiscal’ aspects seen in terms of the economic gains from transfers (Guha 2011: 7-9), the researches on ‘collective remittance’ direct attention towards that parts of remittances which are set aside for social causes such as setting up educational institutions and hospitals, drinking water project, micro credit initiatives. Distribution channels are critical to diaspora philanthropy because they affect both the volume and the purposes of giving. Since social remittances that are strategic in character emanate from clear sources and travel through identifiable pathways to clear destinations, certain kinds of remittance flows can be purposefully stimulated. Social remittance impact therefore depends on how easy a particular remittance is to transmit, who carries the message and the receiver’s gender, class and life-cycle positions (Levitt 1998: 938-939). Few studies have tried to relate the changing nature of remittance transfers within the existing social and political context in order to assess the effects that such transfers can have on groups and the region (Dekkers & Rutten 2011). The more precise, personalized and identifiable pathways of remittance transmission raises interesting questions about the nature of remittance as a social fact – the societal implications of the continuities and discontinuities between the adhoc, diffused diasporic practices of giving as we see in the case of ‘dan’ expressed in a religious idiom to more strategic forms of giving through tightly connected, dense,

structured social networks between clearly recognizable set of individuals or groups belonging to a geographic area..

Collective remittance can also occur when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin; when non-migrants visit their migrant family members or through interchanges of letters, videos, cassettes and telephone calls. Social remittance impact therefore depends on how easy a particular remittance is to transmit, who carries the message and the receiver's gender, class, caste and life-cycle positions. Some remittances have a stronger effect because they travel with other remittances. Remittances traveling through multiple pathways also wield a more significant effect. The force of transmission effects remittance impact. If many remittances are emitted consistently during a short time, their impact is greater than transfers emerging on a more periodic basis. While these concerns are typical to the Dominican case, substantiated in Peggy Levitt's work (1998), it suggests the need to further probe the nature of social remittance transfers involving countries that are culturally and geographically farther apart.

3. Situating Javalpur through the Indian diaspora-homeland lens

Using the 'Banyan tree' metaphor, for India's diaspora, where the tree "that has thrust down roots in the soil which is stony, sandy and marshy draws sustenance from diverse unpromising conditions and where the banyan tree itself has changed in response to its different environments", (Hugh Tinker 1974; Jayaram 2004: 15) allows social scientists to fashion their research framework in ways that show clearly how migrants intensively conduct activities and maintain substantial commitments which link them with significant others (such as kin, co-villagers, fellow members of a religious group or ethnic groups) who dwell in places other than those in which the migrants themselves reside.

"Like other movements and displacements of people, the Indian diaspora and particularly the Gujarati diaspora grew out of many causes and crossing" (Lal et al. 2007: 10). Gujarat has had a long history of international migration and Gujaratis are one of the largest Indian communities' abroad (Jain 1993: 36). Though generally ties between the early Indian communities and their homeland weakened over time, migrants from Gujarat

have always maintained connections with their home region (Pocock 1972: 71). Many of the early settlers in East Africa made regular visits to their home village. Remittances were made to family members in India and capital acquired abroad was often invested in agriculture and real estate back home (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 5). Results were showing as far back as the 1930s, where funds used in boring new tube wells resulted in an increase in tobacco cultivation in central Gujarat region (Chandra 1997: 163). From the mid-1960s, many Gujaratis left East Africa for Britain on account of political radicalism associated with several “Africanisation” programmes (Michaelson 1978/79: 351; Tambs-Lyche 1980: 41). Since early 1970s, the migration partially shifted to the United States and Canada. The nature of migrant’s connect to the homeland has been markedly different within the migration order that emerged in the closing decades of the 20th century. Contrary to historical patterns neither settlement nor severing of home country ties was inevitable (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004: 1180). This leads us to think as Kyle does of “an emergent transnational social reality, involving migrants and non-migrants alike and not simply an international movement of labor as in a New Economics of Labour Migration” (2000:9). The point about non-migrants is significant here in which the transnational social reality incorporates and infuses the “bifocality”² of many people “left behind”.

Typically, a multi-caste village, comprising of Patels (landowning castes) number of persons - (896), Brahmins (8) , Thakor (OBCs or Rajput) (1078), Rawal (Rajputs) (382), Prajapati (Rajputs or OBCs) (18), Mistry (16), Suthar (22), Rabari (68), Dalits (122), Javalpur, situated in the district of Mehsana, North Gujarat has been a relatively new entrant in the history of international migration in Gujarat, recording the first case of migration abroad in 1968. Estimating the total population of a village in dry land regions where migration is a way of life is fraught with difficulties owing to absence of residents some of whom have either gone abroad or have seasonally migrated to nearby cities. The total population after corroborating from various sources is 2610, with an approximate population of 388 (all from the Patidar community) living in the United States in New York, New Jersey and Atlanta. The village sarpanch and her family recalled two Patels having migrated to the United States back then.

With the dominant Patels and insignificant number of Brahmins occupying areas near the village centre, residential segregation is strictly along caste lines. Due to remittances and conspicuous investments in houses and temples, this village clearly bears witness to international migration since the late 60s. Situating Javalpur, known sometimes in a pejorative sense as a '*Dollariya gaon*', within an inter-village kin (agnatic/cognatic) and non-kin (affinal) networks based on an extended hierarchical system of endogamous marriage circles called 'gols' (Pocock 1972; Hardiman 1981) is critical to understanding the effects of transnational flows on a set of villages (big and small). This perspective connects the village to a regional canvas of marriage alliances, market transactions and horizontal solidarities/exchanges between sub-castes. Any remittance flow to the village will have immediate resonances within the 'gols' and vice versa. The efficacy in keeping the national or regional optic/effects of transnational flows into origin countries, while important in itself, should not divert attention from the need to take into account the effects of tangible/intangible resource flows into specific places of origin, such as a village or a town.

4. Organizing the Field

How to organize fieldwork when connections spread outwards into distant places and back? Fieldwork in Javalpur village was conducted over a period of five months. The villages with high degree of international migration are productive settings for understanding pathways abroad, chains and its links with those left behind because of their well-defined boundaries. Yet access and continued access is always a problem due to the spectre of illegal international migration extant in these villages. An incident occurred while conversing with a Thakor family member (male head of the household) in which as our conversation was veering towards the issue of migration, a Patel lady who happened to be their landlord appeared as if to interrupt our talk. She was informed by the wife of the respondent (as I learnt later that non-Patels do inform their landlords from the Patel community about anyone who is seeking information from them on international migration related issues). Interviewing under these circumstances was trying

because of the community surveillance that kept tab of what information goes in and out and who is to be and not to be given information concerning migration³.

Primary data was collected using in-depth interviews and observation and group discussion. Data was collected keeping in mind the following class of respondents: households with members who have migrated; representatives of the organizations involved in remittance related issues and leaders of the community to which the migrant belongs; key informants in the community; return migrants who have engaged in productive activities and non-migrant members belonging to different castes. Use of purposive/random/snowball sampling methods in consultation with key informants or concerned organizations in the area, enabled access and interaction. The additional problem was locked houses which broke the networks at certain junctures.

Sample size: Total – 93 respondents. Patidars – 35 respondents (6 households with members having migrated abroad; 1 household not having migrated abroad; 2 return migrants, sarpanch, 7 members from the trusts/associations in the village) and in addition group discussion with 5 patidar youths; Brahmin – 3 respondents (one household). Non-migrants non-Patel castes: Thakor – 15 respondents (3 households); Rawal – 10 respondents (2 households); in addition group discussion with 5 Thakor and Rawal ladies together; Prajapati – 5 respondents (one household); Mistry – 5 (one household); Dalits – 5 One household and group discussion; Rabari – 5 (group discussion).

5. Looking for collective remittances: Sites, Structures and Expectations

What visibly demarcates the Patidar occupied areas of the village from the rest is the 30 foot tall village memorial gate. Constructed with remittance money, the gate is situated not at the edges of the village but next to the Meldi Mata mandir near the village centre, a large open space which is host to *Navratri* and *Diwali* functions every year. Conflicting accounts of why the village gate was built at that spot abounded. On asking non-migrant Thakor residents why the gate had to be placed there, they replied saying, “The gate was built by one Prahlad bhai Patel in his parent’s name. Earlier the gate was to be built from the back but then they built it here. We were never told. *Patel logo ka ghar* meaning

residence starts from the gate.”⁴ Members of the Patel castes revealed that the gate served to usher in outsiders into the Meldi Mata mandir, the Meldi Mata being the greatly revered deity in the region.

Diasporic philanthropic activities in India encompass a wide range of activities, with an avowed religious or secular intent. Further the remittance literature to date has been inconclusive on whether altruistic or self-interested motives have dominated. It is donations to temples or other religious establishments which predominate, particularly the commonest and widespread forms of religious giving, including diasporic ones, such as putting coins, milk or food grains at the feet of the idols in temples, giving alms to beggars, offering of grain or rice to the departed, offering raw or cooked food or *dakshina* to gurus, priests and mendicants. Not to lose sight of the tradition of giving food grains also to birds and animals (*pinda dan* – offerings to the deceased) evident in the building of *chabutras* meant for feeding birds (constructed through NRG remittances in Jasalpur). Well off rural folks and their counterparts abroad perform several dharmada functions such as feeding the poor and needy during festivities as a means to earn *puniya* (virtue). The variety of forms of giving shows that there is no single logic of giving or *dan* shared by participants and givers in Indian society which requires that one must make a careful distinction between self-interested and altruistic giving on the one hand and also between altruistic/philanthropic giving and ‘*dan*’, selfless giving constituting the purest form of giving on the other. Complexity arises when we understand the phenomena of ‘*dan*’ from the point of view of the recipients and also those who do not receive. Classically, the act of philanthropy and *dan* in order to gain merit has to be based on the need of the recipient and worthiness (Copeman 2011: 1062). Who is worthy and needy of receiving gifts/remittances from abroad in this context in an Indian village? How can ‘*dan*’ be used properly? Copeman’s discussion of ‘*rakt-dan*’ which makes ‘need the index of a reformulated notion of worth’ is useful in understanding the many ways in which donations/gifts to recipients can be tracked and accounted for and trustworthiness testified. The majority of the recipients of remittances in Indian villages like in Javalpur are those who are not in need (non-migrant members of the dominant caste communities who have members abroad) and are therefore considered unworthy of it in the classical

sense. Therefore the gift do not merit being called a 'dan' or philanthropy, particularly - when the givers are generally intensely suspicious of temple priests or temple foundations. Yet religious organizations continue to be important destinations for donations from NRIs. Transnational connections forged by religious movements often result in moderation or support for religious reform movements such as Islamic reform (Simpson 2003).

The Meldi Mata Yuvak mandal comprising of 11 members nominated from the Patidar community, both home and abroad was established in 1970 with the purpose of overseeing the rebuilding and expansion of the Meldi mata mandir. The relative success of Javalpur's migrants abroad is attributed to what residents say as the '*pratibha*' (persona) and '*kripa*' (blessings) of meldi mata. The diaspora and their contribution to their homeland has grown together with the aura of meldi mata, the village patron deity which emerged, as folklore has it, from a stairwell, and having chosen to make her permanent abode at Javalpur, Meldi mata, has given its inhabitants anchorage and zeal to triumph abroad and give back. The pioneering journeys abroad, the eventual success in the diaspora and the diasporics desire to develop Javalpur are bound up with this intense religious sentiment surrounding the founding and expansion of the Meldi Mata temple and the newly constructed Ramji temple exclusively for the Patidars built entirely with NRGs donation amounting to Rs 2 crores. A senior trust member of the Meldi mata yuvak mandal, Dilipbhai Patel, spoke about the conjoining of two significant events, the emigration of the Patidars abroad together with the 'nirman' of the mandir (temple),

"That the temple had to be made big was an idea that struck those in america. When the yuvak mandal had the wish that the temple had to be expanded then members of the trust went to Saurashtra to a village called Sara. There was something like a Meldi mata mandir there and on seeing the mandir, we got lost in its beauty. We had to build a mandir like that. We went to the architect of that mandir in Saurashtra.. He said that a mandir like that will cost 3 lakhs to begin with and may even be higher. 3 lakhs those days was a big amount. Yuvak mandal had the trust that mata ji will give them money. We had no money that time, but we got together and started work on the foundation. We held a function and pleaded to mata ji, Ma take this forward, we have nothing with us, it

is now up to you. Foundation stone was laid and the main work was to begin. We began to hold an auction. That time there was KC Patel (now expired) who had come down from America. He was brave and giving type. On the auction day, he sent his nephew and told him, ‘Wait for everyone to give their price and in the end give the highest price and do the *khas muhrat* yourself. He gave Rs. 1, 11,111. Others also gave and we had 7 lakh rupees to begin with. Mata ji had told us not to beg for money from anybody, I will get the paisa for you. She got the money and see we had Rs 3 crores to build this temple and she won the trust of everybody.”⁵ Migration is associated with intense competition between social groups and individuals at home, where religious practice – how they worship and consumption/giving how they spend their earnings come to play. Glory of the homeland, glory of the temple and the glory of the *samaj* at home and abroad is part of the celebratory discourse of the diaspora and their co-villagers back home.

The managing trustee of the Meldi mata seva trust who has a garment business in Ahmedabad, Mayankbhai Patel, aged 56 years added, “Others have a question that how come Javalpur in such a short time got so much recognition in Gujarat and abroad? The answer is that the village started with one Patidar family and that is why there is no fighting and we can work together and build our village in all respects. If Patidars are united, so is the village united. Another thing there must be pull towards the village, referring to their members in the diaspora.”⁶ The glimpse of the intense status competition within the patidar community and with the outside world, is noticeable here parallel to the rhetoric of unity, producing what Vinay Gidwani calls a “ruptural unity, an achieved hegemonic alliance always multiple and always troubled by internal fissures”. (Gidwani 2008: 38). Patidars wished for an exclusive temple for themselves. They constructed the Ramji temple in 2005, exclusively through NRI Patidar remittances at a cost of 2 crores. Incidentally, the Umiya mata mandir was built two years before in 2003 by the Patidar samaj in Macon, Atlanta. On asking him why there was a need for another temple next to the Meldi Mata temple, he replied somewhat ambivalently, “Patidars everywhere have a mandir of their own. So we decided to have a mandir for bhagwan and a mandir for mata ji in one place.”⁷ We can observe here a way of differentiating us and them in the sacred realm. The gulf between the rhetoric of migration and the practice of

migration comes out clearly in the way the fruits of migration are imagined, created, divided and seemly distributed for the benefit of all. The member of the committee to oversee this process has to be, as the secretary of the Yuvak Mandal said, “one who can take decisions, is educated, has money power can take out 1 lakh whenever required.”⁸

The ideological role of Hindu communalism which influence many overseas Patels to donate to temples and religious organizations cannot be ruled out, although it is difficult to arrive at conclusions based on evidence since the donations are not routed through formal channels (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 16-18). Temple donation has its critics from within the community. The secretary of the Palliyad hospital expressed his discontent with remittance funds going into temples and not hospitals, stating, “I know a person from my village who had donated 2 crores towards a Jain programme in Sabarmati. Next day the Godhra riots took place they could not go to Mumbai by road. I told them to be ready by 10 in the morning. We kept their luggage in an ambulance and took them to the railway station. I arranged for their ticket. He offered me Rs 500 only as donation. I risked so much but he could offer only that. The challenge is to get donations from those abroad. They should give out of their own choice. There should be no pressure from our side.”⁹

In many such cases we do see how conspicuous consumption of migrants, return migrants and those non-migrants related to them by kinship and community life-styles, targeted character of diasporic donations are denigrated and loathed upon by ‘non-migrant others’ in the village. A Thakor community member, Rajesh Thakor, aged 38 years, who owned a tea stall, remarked on asking him what Non-resident Gujaratis abroad do when they come back to their village, “They come mainly in Diwali and Navratri. They do not do anything but move around. They only have a good time. That big house which you see, it is only for show. Our village maybe called ‘*dollariya gaon*’, but we do not get grains or dal even to eat.”¹⁰ The cynicism and a sense of relative deprivation of the local people towards the way of life of the Patel migrant’s when they come home for their annual visits in the same way rubs onto some of the migrant-funded development projects and

houses. The non-Patel non-migrants perceive these projects as investments towards migrant's own social status.

Donations have been towards the renovation of the secondary school and making of the boundary wall in 2011 for which money was pooled together by the *Salahkar* committee in the United States. About Rs 40 lakhs was spent on renovation. The government, in turn, provides grant-in-aid to the school which covers the salary and 35% of the maintenance cost. About 90% of the children belong to non-Patel castes, whereas only 10% belong to Patel families, who prefer to send their children to English medium or better gujarati medium schools in nearby Kadi and Kalol. The *Salahkar* committee comprising of the patidars has been in touch with the school Trust via the internet and phone. The member of the sarvajanik school trust mentioned that “for two years fees was given towards the education of needy and meritorious students and school dress was provided, yet many of them left school in between. We have tried to get them to finish 10th standard. No result from our side, so our America people stopped giving this.”¹¹ The P.H. Bhagwati Sarvajanik hospital came up in the village 25 year ago. An ambulance was bought from donations. Its lack of staff and inefficient management has been the frequent complaint of the village residents, with the management presided over by one member, having been at odds with the panchayat office as well as other trusts in the village. The hospital caters to the needs of mainly the non-Patel community members, with the Patidars choosing hospitals in nearby towns for medical treatment. Drinking water facility has been provided for residents and visitors to the village through NRG contribution. Besides donations have been used for building a *Pankhighar* situated at one corner of the village square near the panchayat office at a cost of Rs 5 lakhs. A community Hall with a garden having a volleyball court and a watch tower was built as well. Its use is however restricted to the members of the Patidar community. Alongside these donations are plaques of different sizes with names of donors engraved on it seen on the structures built through NRGs Patidar's money. What emerges from private conversations with both patidars and non-patidars, during unguarded moments is that migrants who aspire to have their plaques engraved on the structures are not the ones who gain merit or esteem in public. A non-migrant Patidar derisively remarked saying that

“migrants are particularly attracted to having their names on a plaque wherever they donate.”¹² Those migrants able to give ‘*dan*’, that is, disembodied giving in which donation is done selflessly and anonymously, are ones who are privately held in higher esteem and gain recognition in the Indian system of gifting in public. Though such selfless modes of giving are infrequent and irregular, they do set the standards for judging and evaluating the worth of a gift and the worthiness of the giver.

6. Bonding through Dan and other forms of collective giving?

What is a good donation? Several respondents have invoked what in common parlance is called ‘*gupt-dan*’ (secret donation) particularly revered and extolled because as Laidlaw says, ‘it is immune from the ‘immediate reward of an increase in a donor’s public status and people say that because of this the unseen reward which comes as a merit or good karma will be greater’ (Laidlaw 1995: 297). *Gupt-dan* is ‘mobilized as a counter to the quite familiar public accusation that India does not possess a socially favourable ‘giving culture’... Dan may thus be invoked online as a response to the hurt national sentiments of the religious patriot; its public life consisting of claims that dan is frequently not public’ (Copeman 2011: 1097). The anonymity of the donor and who is unaware of the recipient of their donations as in a classical ‘*dan*’ mode of giving can work well and made in tandem with philanthropic activity provided the need and worthiness of the recipient is carefully selected. The donor can forsake his/her identity in the act of giving and achieve desired results in terms of ensuring that the donation reaches the really needy and worthy, only when institutions of care, such as the blood bank, as Healy suggests, ‘performs its duty to elaborate the meaning and nature of donation to all concerned parties such that the result is not only a practical system of procurement and distribution but also a moral order of exchange (Healy 2006: 17). Although the potentially life threatening risk factors associated with offering blood donors incentives in the practice of ‘*rakt-dan*’ is more, compared to other types of dan/collective remittances, yet status enhancing motives that donors have in relation to contribution towards development activities can have deleterious results, evidenced through what Charles Tilly (1998) calls ‘opportunity hoarding’, heightening schisms between castes and attendant social

psychological feelings of envy, loathing, deprivation among non-migrant-non-Patidars in the village. For instance a Darbar respondent, Jayeshbhai (a tea shop owner) in bitterly complaining about the migrant indifference to the plight of non-migrant non-Patels alleged, “The Patels often take money from the temple trust funds to go to America, we know that some have taken 20 lakhs which they then sent back as remittance to the village. This is what they do.”¹³ It is these instances of mistrust and utter contempt and the corresponding weakening of vertical ties between castes in a village that leads us to begin in a preliminary way to work out strategies and understand the modalities or conditions for the possibility of a convergence between elements/principles of ‘*dan*’ and other types of exchange/philanthropy in order to facilitate forms of giving towards productive ends.

Numerically preponderant, the Thakor and Ravals during the pre-migration years worked in the households of Patels as casual labour, particularly the women. They also nurse the desire to go abroad like their Patel counterparts a kind of contagion, but they are unable to do so for lack of funds, capital, networks and chains. Thakor respondents often spoke of how Patels would give them hope of going abroad if they do good work here. They still have managed to go for seasonal work to nearby towns, educate some of their children in schools in the nearby towns of Kadi and Kalol for the last two decades or so. This begs the question how far non-Patel migrant agency arising out of their migratory experiences leads to what Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003: 198) say as an ‘oppositional consciousness, spaces of cultural assertion which undermines the sedentarist metaphysics of modern forms of domination’. Though there has not been any formidable challenge to Patidar authority, yet resentment was expressed through conscious choices by non-Patidars regarding work. With Patel emigration in the last two decades of the 20th century, there was greater opportunity for non-Patidars to cultivate the lands owned by Patidars. Yet the young men age group 20-45 years has begun to prefer daily migratory work in the dairy farming units and in the newly set up factories such as Hitachi, Torrent, ceramic companies and oil mills in nearby towns, like Kadi and Kalol in the Mehsana and Gandhinagar districts respectively to evade agricultural work under Patel employers. The pecuniary benefits being more in factory work (250 rs per diem)

than agricultural work (unfixed), although the pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits of agricultural and non-agricultural work would amount to the same. The Patidars often voicing their concern that there is hardly any one left to work in their fields. Agricultural labourers have to be brought from outside, around 276 of them working on 761 hectares of agricultural land. But as Thakors and Darbars say, “Patels speak in roundabout ways. They know that if they begin to help thakor’s migrate then Thakor’s will get their own co-castes abroad. Who will labour their lands then?’ They can help a Mistry or a Darji caste to go abroad perhaps but not a Thakor.”¹⁴ The Patidars’ tactics to immobilize and mitigate the loss of control of labour power is through giving futile hopes/aspirations, incentives to stay and cultivate on their lands, assisting in marriages (*samuh lagn* – conducting mass marriage ceremonies) and exercising control over ‘*gauchar*’ (waste) lands.

The narrative at the national level is one where the Indian state is showing greater interest in tapping the potential of the Indian diaspora, by framing policies and rules that would encourage the diaspora to contribute to their homeland. A full-fledged ministry of Overseas Indian affairs has been formed. Central and State level offices have been set up for overseeing diaspora affairs. Report of the High Level Committee of India Diaspora stressed on the need to create Fast Track Mechanisms for attracting donations for developmental purposes. In response to the long-standing demand of the Indian diaspora and the recommendations of the High Level Committee, Indian Parliament passed a bill in December 2003 (Citizenship Amendment Bill 2003 to grant dual citizenship to PIOs belonging to 16 countries. The Vatan Sewa Project by the NRG Foundation, Government of Gujarat is there to enable NRGs to contribute to their state. Information containing different schemes for Vatan Sewa has been prepared to assist NRGs in deciding the kind of work they would like to take up in their homeland and on donating to the Gokul Gram Vikas Fund which has been registered under the Bombay Charitable Trust Act. Those who donate 5 lakhs or more, can have a plaque mentioning that the village is adopted by the donor. Any asset created through such donations shall remain the property of the Gram Panchayat. Yet the donor’s distrust towards formal institutions in India is underscored by the fact that many individuals choose to use family and close friends from

their own community caste as conduits for charitable gifts and social investments believing that they are the most trustworthy of intermediaries and those best able to identify local needs. Once these focused, strategic forms of giving begin addressing local issues or problems, the larger concerns of equitable development or social justice in a village setting falls by the wayside. The migrant and their co-caste members' distrust for formal institutions has unintended consequences for village residents. A Darbar resident who annoyingly mentioned that "the migrant and non-migrant Patidar's would often tell a state functionary that we have a lot of money and that we have developed the village, you need not come here,"¹⁵ which creates a situation where some of the provisions of basic civic amenities get neglected, although the government has provided for street lights and drainage facilities over the years. 'This particular strand of the mutual links between the Indian diaspora and state centric expectations relates to the idea of a secular, globalizing economy and a deeply territorial, nationalist idea of India. In variance with the above strand is one where the diaspora has deep and powerful provincial local affinities at the village level which can be at once religious, filial and developmental' (Chaturvedi 2005: 165).

7. Concluding remarks

Diaspora's engagement with collective giving communicates their concern with promoting the welfare of the group to which the giving is intended. Though 'dan', disinterested giving, as Copeman (2011:1061) says, 'functions in public largely as an unproblematic indicator of Indian charity – a genius of Indian culture', partaking from the metaphysic of renunciation, collective remittances emanating from clear sources and travel across national spaces through identifiable pathways can have one-sided results for a community in a village space.

How to make possible the 'culture of giving', given the particular context in which religious and secular practices of giving coexist and are in a state of 'creative tension'? Clearly few individuals have the capacity and will to give repeatedly and freely without any kind of external reward. We also find competing claims by groups who seek to have a share of the diasporic offerings in both material and non-material terms that places the

givers in a situation of resentment, particularly when realities on the ground is contrary to their expectations. Generalization of social approval and esteem such that the practice of giving brings overt approval from others, recipients and non-recipients alike and internalized reactions of good conscience and enhanced self-image' is a way to ensure democratic inclusion, credibility and accountability within and between groups in rural social life touched by modernity. Non-membership of non-migrant non-Patidar communities in village associations/trusts such as we find in Javalpur is a major obstacle towards realizing this end. The question local trusts/organizations and the diaspora have to ask is not only who do we represent but more importantly what do we represent – do we represent a village, a community or '*kutumb*', forces of development, a region, a country or an ethos. These significations does and can reconstitute the idea and materiality of the village, in which the original bounds of a village get stretched, while hierarchies/statuses get reconstituted around the axis of migration/non-migration. Can a village collective as 'a uniting form of social organization' (Oscar Lewis 1958) be conceived through formation of groups/associations which cut across castes/factions in the age of migration? Rarely can this occur, unless gifts or remittances which make their entry into rural social life where caste and kinship dominate are understood in terms of their implications for inter-group relations within and outside the village. The centrality of migration among all groups in dry land regions like in and around Javalpur village points to the fact that migrant connections with their places of origin, have varied effects on not only those who have lived mobile lives but also 'those who have stayed behind' as part of the unequal struggle for recognition, acquisition and domination in a place. In the context where members of a particular community/associations have the monopoly over norms and modes of giving and belonging, participating and contesting, a particular social project through diasporic giving fails to have the legitimating force that has worth and benefits for all villagers.

States in setting their political and administrative goals need to work alongside migrant associations in villages without excessive regulatory intent, identify non-beneficiaries of migration, set issues that are in common with transnational migrants and integrate both migrants and non-migrants alike into the development processes in the region. Marketing

diasporas for commercial or productive ends and the obligation to give on the part of diasporics in response to popular religious sentiment has to be carefully assessed taking into account how groups or individuals receive donations. In forging a transnational relation, philanthropic transfer should not be a one way street. Information from educators, NGOs and other professionals, government agencies serving local communities in the country of origin could help their counterparts in the diaspora be more effective and sensitive in their motivations and acts of giving, notwithstanding the relative social and historical differences between sending and receiving countries.

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End Notes

¹ Nowhere is the aspiration associated with remittances more clearly marked on the landscapes of migrants’ home regions than in the form of housing. For many migrants and their families, the priority in using remittances after paying off debts is the construction of a new family home.

² How such bifocality is structured and how it functions depends upon a number of variables and contextual conditions. Bifocality is hard to ‘measure’, but its workings are clearly discernible in social practices and conveyed in individual narratives.

³ Katy Gardner in her study of Sylheti migration also showed the pitfalls of conducting research on international migration in places where illegal migration is rife. Any data regarding international migration is thereby sensitive. Fictitious names of respondents and of the village has been used to ensure anonymity.

⁴ Interviews with non-migrant Thakor residents held between 22nd and 25th November, 2012 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

⁵ Interview with a senior trust member, Dilipbhai Patel, aged 62, held on 4th December, 2012 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

⁶ Interview with the managing trustee of the Meldi mata seva trust, Mayankbhai Patel, aged 56 years held on 2nd January, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

⁷ Interview with the managing trustee of the Meldi mata seva trust Mayankbhai Patel, aged 56 years held on 2nd January, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

⁸ Interview with the managing trustee of the Meldi mata seva trust Mayankbhai Patel, aged 56 years held on 2nd January, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

⁹ Interview with the secretary of the Palliyad hospital, Aswinbhai Patel, aged 79 years held on 6th January 2013 in Palliyad village which is part of the 42 village samaj of the Patidar community which includes Javalpur in Gujarat.

¹⁰ Interview with a Thakor community member, Rajesh Thakor, aged 38 years, on 18th February, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

¹¹ Interview with the member of the Sarvajanic school trust, Bharatbhai Patel, aged 66 years held on 2nd January, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

¹² Interview with a non-migrant Patidar, Bharatbhai Patel, aged 45 years on 22nd February, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat

¹³ Interview with a Darbar respondent, Jayeshbhai (a tea shop owner), aged 42 years, 6th March, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

¹⁴ Interviews with Thakors and Darbar residents between 22nd and 26th March, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

¹⁵ Interview with a Darbar resident, Ramanbhai, aged 54 years, 6th March, 2013 in Javalpur, Gujarat.

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