



'Some people expect women should always be dependent': Indian women's experiences as highly skilled migrants



Anu Kōu^{a,*}, Ajay Bailey^{a,b}

^a Population Research Centre, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, PO Box 800, 9700 AV Groningen, The Netherlands

^b Dr. T. M. A. Pai Endowed Chair in Qualitative Methods, Manipal University, Manipal, India

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ABSTRACT

The intersections of migration and gender have been well established in the literature. This article seeks to look beyond the notion of women as tied movers and to highlight women's central position in the high-skilled migration process and complement it with the perspectives of male migrants. Our findings are based on 47 qualitative life course interviews with high-skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and illustrated in detail through the life stories of four female participants. We found that for highly skilled Indian women, migration can represent an opportunity to diverge from normative paths and escape from patriarchal norms, but that they still seek a compromise between these cultural constraints and their personal aspirations. Whereas in the Western context traditions and modernity are generally seen as being in opposition to each other, we show that in the Indian context women may continue to adhere to the normative age at marriage, while also pursuing a professional career and combining family and employment. We conclude that migration can thus both facilitate and limit the professional development of women, particularly those from traditional cultural backgrounds who are redefining the role of women in their society.

1. Introduction

The share of immigrants in the OECD countries who are highly skilled grew by 70 per cent in the first decade of the 21st century, reaching a total of 27 million (OECD and UNDESA, 2013). In 2010/2011, roughly every third immigrant in these countries was tertiary educated, and India constituted the largest origin group, with two million highly educated members (OECD and UNDESA, 2013). The number of female migrants with higher education in these countries increased 80 per cent between 2000 and 2011 (IOM and OECD, 2014).

The migration literature often describes female migrants as tied movers, while acknowledging that they are under-researched. Although high-skilled migration provides many opportunities, it can also create challenges for women in particular, as in addition to having a different cultural background, they may experience difficulties in combining work and family that could cause them to leave the labour market or to move to a part-time schedule.

The worldwide feminisation of labour migration is a pattern that is increasingly being recognised in the literature on international migration (Castles et al., 2014). The awareness of women in the migratory process has grown since the 1960s, as female educational attainment has risen and female participation in the labour market has expanded

(Castles et al., 2014). Female labour market participation has been boosted by an increase in part-time employment opportunities (Thévenon, 2013).

Our aim is to investigate the interplay between gender norms and cultural contexts in the migration experiences of high-skilled female Indian migrants. We seek to look beyond the notion of tied movers to highlight the position of women in the high-skilled migration process. Specifically, we examine how gender norms, relations, and expectations affect migration decisions and plans. In the following sections, we provide a short overview of the research on high-skilled migration and gender, as well as a sketch of the educational and employment situations of women in India. We then describe our data collection and methodology. Next, we present our findings on gender norms as experienced in the life stories of high-skilled female migrants from India, and complement these accounts with the perspectives of their male counterparts. We seek to illustrate how women navigate between cultural regulations and their personal aspirations in structuring their life course choices, especially those related to education, employment, and union and family formation. We conclude that migration can provide women with more power to determine their own life course events and transitions, and to escape patriarchal norms.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anukou@gmail.com (A. Kōu), a.bailey@rug.nl (A. Bailey).

2. Background

2.1. (High-skilled) migration and gender

The intersections of migration and gender have been well established in the literature (e.g., Raghuram and Kofman, 2004; Donato et al., 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011). Gender relations both produce and are produced by migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Xiang, 2005). Generally, male migrants have been at the centre of migration theories, whereas female migrants have been predominantly regarded as dependants (Morokvasic, 1984) and are frequently excluded from skilled migration data and analysis (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, p. 3) asserts that gender ‘is not simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organise immigration patterns’. Kanaiaupuni (2000, p. 1336) suggests migration should be viewed as ‘a series of relationships between social and economic factors and gender’. Lutz (2010) presents gender as a frame for understanding migratory processes: labour market segments at the macro level; organisation of work at the meso level; and individual practices, identities, and positions at the micro level.

Research on gender should therefore avoid focusing on women only (Mahler and Pessar, 2006), or framing the topic in simplistic men-versus-women terms. Instead of concentrating on women, these studies should regard gender as an organising principle in migration (Levitt et al., 2003). Xiang (2005) points out that while most migration and gender research takes a broad view of women’s experiences of migration, scholars should examine explicitly the lack of (labour market) participation among female migrants. Raghuram (2004) observes that (Indian) women are underrepresented in international migration, particularly in the field of information technology (IT), because migration requires career flexibility and geographical mobility, which women may find difficult to achieve if they are expected to adhere to gender norms and fulfil family obligations.

The double burden of domestic and wage labour is an issue that is debated in Western societies as well, albeit to a lesser extent. For migrant women, labour force participation is often hindered not just by gender discrimination (e.g., by the assumption that women will work only until they marry or have children), but also by ethnic and racial stereotypes (Castles et al., 2014).

The skills of migrants and transfer of skills are issues that are closely related to their labour market participation (see, e.g., Raghuram and Kofman, 2004). High-skilled migration policies tend to give preference to skills in upper-level management, engineering, IT, and physical research (Rubin et al., 2008). Owing to structural differences in the gender composition in related careers, men are more likely to possess those skills than women (Purkayastha, 2005). Migrant women are more likely to be qualified in education and medical sectors where the transfer of skills can be problematic (Aggergaard-Larsen et al., 2005). However, Raghuram (2008) draws attention to the fact that a large part of the migration literature studies women from the perspective of feminised roles: either as spouses of male primary movers, or as workers in female-dominated sectors of the labour market, thus neglecting both the growing number of female migrants in male-dominated sectors such as IT, and the differences in gendered migration experiences across the different roles and sectors. Purkayastha (2005) uses the term ‘cumulative disadvantage’ to refer to how discrimination against migrant women at one level leads to discrimination at the next level in the political, home, and work domains. Many scholars argue that there should be a differentiation between qualifications and skills, i.e., education and experience. Fosslund (2013, p. 281) points out that ‘the distinction between “highly qualified” and “highly skilled” migrants captures the cultural and relational processes involved, demonstrating that “highly skilled” migrants possess the ability to transfer knowledge into the receiving context’. However, based on data from the EU Labour Force Survey in 2005, Rubin et al. (2008) conclude that highly educated third-country female migrants have lower labour force

participation and employment rates than their native or EU counterparts, whereas low-educated third-country female migrants tend to have employment rates that are similar to those of native-born women.

Skills are thus spatially, socially, and culturally embedded (Aure, 2013). In seeking to understand the experiences of highly skilled migrants, it is also crucial to look at immigration policies (Iredale, 2005; Kofman, 2014). Many of these policies seem to be based on the assumption that migrants are generally men, and that women are mainly co-movers. Yet to make it easier for women to transfer their skills, migration policies should be not only gender neutral, but gender sensitive (Iredale, 2005). Roos (2013) suggests that policymakers and companies that wish to attract skilled workers should take the lead in recognising the potential of (female) co-migrants and their labour market skills.

In response to the underrepresentation of highly skilled women in the international migration research, this paper seeks to advance this knowledge by highlighting that female highly skilled migrants need to be considered as equal players on the labour market.

2.2. Tied movers

The theoretical and empirical evidence that has been cited in support of the concept of tied movers is controversial. A number of scholars have argued that women tend to migrate to advance their husbands’ careers, while being prepared to sacrifice their own.

Although many (quantitative) studies primarily use pre- and post-migration earnings to evaluate labour market outcome, income should not be the only criterion for assessing migrants’ success (or failure) in achieving social mobility. Non-monetary aspects of work, such as job satisfaction, career advancement opportunities, international experience, work environment, flexible working hours/location, are becoming increasingly important on the job market (Kōu et al., 2015). In the migration statistics, many women are categorised as family members and not as highly skilled migrants when they enter the labour market (Iredale, 2005; Aure, 2013). Kofman (1999) emphasises that migrant categories are not fixed: for instance, a family migrant becomes a labour migrant when they get a job.

Women are often found to experience deskilling due to migration and consequentially re-orient towards the domestic sphere (Man, 2004; Ho, 2006). The migration literature has generally argued that working women who migrate suffer less from their ‘trailing wife’ than from their ‘trailing mother’ status (Cooke, 2001; Ackers, 2004). Geist and McManus (2012) observe that a migrant woman in a dual-career couple with equal earnings is unlikely to exit the labour market or work part-time after migration, and that her contribution to the household economy may be a safeguard against becoming a tied mover. Shinozaki (2014) points out that research on women as tied movers emphasises their roles as wives and mothers, and thus reinforces gender stereotypes. Drawing on a large-scale dataset on skilled and unskilled migrants from all countries to OECD countries in 1990 and 2000, Docquier et al. (2012) conclude that women are more willing than men to follow their spouse.

Women with professional aspirations in the destination country can also be described as active agents rather than as passive movers in the migration decision-making process (Hiller and McCaig, 2007; Kōu and Bailey, 2014). Research by González Ramos and Vergés Bosch (2013) on highly skilled migrant women in Spain emphasises the importance of a supportive partner (and family, society more broadly): even if the women did not initiate or participate in the migration decision-making, they still developed their own careers abroad and thus were satisfied with the move. Contrary to prevailing claims in the migration and gender research, Guo et al. (2011) suggest that migration actually narrows the gender gap by empowering women both professionally and domestically, as they gain higher levels of independence on the job market and within the family. Gender expectations can also prove supportive in certain ways: whereas men may feel obliged to continue

Table 1
Profile of participants (N = 47).

Characteristic		Number of participants	Characteristic		Number of participants
<i>Gender</i>	Female	11	<i>Age^a</i>	25–29	24
	Male	36		30–34	10
<i>Marital status</i>	Single	12		35–40	6
	Relationship	6	<i>Occupation^b</i>	Research	15
	Engaged	5		Engineering	9
	Married	23		IT	9
	Divorced	1		Finance	4
		Medicine		4	
<i>Has a child or children</i>		14	Other	5	

^a Two participants were 24 years old and five were over age 40.

^b One participant was on parental leave.

to work to provide for the family, women may anticipate less stigma if they withdraw from the labour market for additional education (Aure, 2013) or for childcare (Rao, 2014a). Moreover, the share of male tied movers is increasing, particularly among the husbands of Indian female medical workers (George, 2005; Gallo, 2006; Raghuram, 2006). This paper adds to the literature by showcasing how female tied movers need not to sacrifice their careers for the sake of advancing their husbands' careers, but that they use the professional opportunities that migration creates.

2.3. Women, education, and employment in India

Just three decades ago, the female literacy rate in India was 25 per cent, in comparison with 47 per cent for men (Ramu, 1987). Although this gender disparity has decreased in recent years, women still lag behind: in 2011, the respective literacy rates were 65 and 82 per cent (Census of India, 2011a). As women were traditionally expected to be just homemakers, investments in their education were considered unnecessary. In the past few decades, however, the increasing participation of women in higher education has delayed marriage (and child-bearing), and has led women to have a greater sense of autonomy and confidence in their ability to make their own decisions (Maslak and Singhal, 2008). More women are in higher education as the result of the emergence of an aspirational middle class where parents place equal importance on education for girls and boys. Having higher education, in turn, increases migration likelihood for women (e.g., Kanaiaupuni, 2000). Maertens (2013) observes that the education and (marital) age norms in a society determine the extent to which women's participation in the labour market is accepted. Drawing from the results of a nationwide survey in 2005, Desai and Andrist (2010) show that women with higher secondary and above education marry on average 4.9 years later than those with less education, although the authors acknowledge that the direction of causality between the level of education and age at marriage is not completely clear. Overall, census data from 2001 indicate that approximately 95 per cent of women are married by age of 25 and men by 32 (Desai and Andrist, 2010). Klasen and Pieters (2015) find that female labour force participation in urban areas has stagnated in the 1980s even though there has been an increase in education levels and decline in fertility.

In early studies on this issue, Ramu (1987) found that even in dual-earner couples, the husband typically did not alter his participation in domestic work, while the wife often continued to adhere to traditional gender role expectations. According to González Ramos and Torrado Martín-Palomino (2015, 2), 'women may be impelled by gender bias in the labour market or lack of freedom in a patriarchal family'. However, since female quotas have recently been implemented at Indian governmental institutions, positive discrimination has also been taking place. If organisations and forms of work change, the restrictions imposed by gender and marital norms could also loosen. Our study emphasises that, in addition to education, migration can play a central role

in creating more autonomy in life course decision-making for Indian skilled women.

3. Data and methods

We used in-depth interviews to get detailed accounts of the experiences of highly skilled migrants from the micro perspective. The usefulness of a qualitative approach in researching the life course of migrants has been addressed in our earlier work (Kōu and Bailey, 2014). As our research instrument builds on the biographic-narrative interview method (see Wengraf, 2001), the participants were asked to tell their life story. Based on the events and experiences the participants recounted, the education, employment, household, and migration paths were examined. Where applicable, additional topics were raised to elicit a discussion on gendered migration experiences. The interview transcriptions were inductively analysed by creating codes, categories, and themes using the qualitative software programme MAXQDA.

Our data highlight three main themes which predominantly determine the gendered migration experiences of the study participants. Firstly, 'societal expectations and personal aspirations' illustrates the opposition that highly skilled women often find themselves in. Secondly, 'timing of life course events' incorporates categories such as normative age at marriage, postponement of life course events due to migration, or parallel life course careers. We also reflect on gender differences regarding those aspects of the life course. Thirdly, following the husband, using professional opportunities created by migration, and seeking work-life balance are gathered under the theme 'tied movers'.

We focus on high-skilled migrants from India as the country has one of the largest pools of highly skilled labour in the world (Sasikumar and Hussian, 2008). The Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK) as destination countries allow us to study potential dissimilarities stemming from their institutional contexts as well as in terms of different migration history from India (see also Kōu and Bailey, 2014).

Our results are based on 47 interviews: with 22 highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and 25 in the UK. The research participants (see Table 1) were recruited among Indian migrants aged 25–40 who were working in a professional sector job, had been living in or were intending to live in the respective country for at least one year, and who preferably had a knowledge migrant visa (the Netherlands) or a Highly Skilled Migrant Programme or Tier 1 or Tier 2 visa (the UK). To recruit for range of occupations we used multiple recruitment sites: Amsterdam, Eindhoven, and Groningen in the Netherlands and London and Southampton in the UK. The data were collected between June 2010 and August 2011. Of the 11 interviewed women, five were married and one was in a relationship, two had children. The gender composition of participants reflects that of highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands: approximately every fourth is a woman (INDIAC, 2009). Similar gender composition is observed in countries where data are available (Kofman, 2014; p.122).

The findings are presented primarily as case studies, each of which

provides an initial sketch of the (gendered) high-skilled migration experiences of one of the female participants. Each case study is then embedded in the context of the experiences and perceptions of other participants, thus the analysis includes data from all 47 interviews. By complementing the case studies with views expressed by other participants, both female and male, we highlight the interlinkages between gender norms and migration of highly skilled Indians. The stories in the case studies showcase particular elements of migration and gender that illustrate not just the experiences of the individual participant but certain patterns recognised by a range of participants.

4. Findings: Gender norms as experienced in the life stories of high-skilled female Indian migrants

4.1. 'I'm just too old to get married'

Cultural perceptions of gender and age at life course events, specifically the timing of marriage, are central to Veena's¹ story. Failing to meet age-related societal norms can have both negative and positive consequences for the individual. For Veena, delaying marriage first allowed her to participate in tertiary education and later to move abroad to pursue her professional goals. But as a result of these postponements she had been unable to find a marriage partner, as in Indian society a woman over age 30 is considered too old for marriage.

Veena is in her mid-thirties and has been living in the UK for nearly a decade. Her parents lived in a small traditional village, but because her grandparents wanted her to grow up in a more open-minded environment, she was mainly raised by them in a bigger town. She saw her grandmother, who worked outside the home and was the first woman from her village to attend college, as a role model who motivated her to work towards becoming financially independent. Veena moved to Bangalore to attend university, where she started her professional career and experienced a metropolitan environment for the first time.

After receiving her master's degree, she moved within India to work for a few years, until she 'quite randomly' decided to search for job opportunities abroad.

[If I had not moved to Bangalore] I would behave like, you know, how people in that village behave. Which is... you must get married by the time you are 22. Must have four children by the time you are 30. So... what I am today, I just think 'Oh God, no! That's just hell!' [laughs] I'm so glad I didn't do all those things. When I got my job here and I told my grandmother... My grandfather did say to her that do you really think it's wise for [Veena] to leave it? India, now. Because I was 26. Which is already late for marriage and they were trying to find someone for me. But they just couldn't find someone or... who liked me, I didn't like them, people I liked, they didn't like me, so it just wasn't... going very well. But then, my grandmother said 'She's not going to get this kind of opportunity again, let her go.' And he said 'Fine!'

Veena has lived and worked in four cities in the UK, and each move represented a chance to advance her professional skills. She has bought a house and is very satisfied with her current work environment. To please her grandparents, she actively looked for a husband after emigrating. Initially she searched for Indian men living in the UK through matrimonial websites and made a few serious attempts, but was unable to find the right match.

I'm just too old. To get married. In Indian culture I'm 10 years over age to get married. No one is going to marry me [laughs sadly]. If that makes sense. I think... unfortunately, I think I'll just have to close that chapter.

Many other participants raised the issue of marriage norm, which

imposes an informal yet narrow range of acceptable age at marriage, especially for women. Marisha (38) reported having experienced these constraints from several perspectives: she married an Indian man in the UK, but divorced a few years later due to differences in values and expectations with her husband and in-laws. Divorce is still stigmatised in Indian society, and a divorced woman has a lower status in the social hierarchy. Marisha was aware that being in her early thirties and not just unmarried, but divorced, clashed with Indian norms. Instead, she decided to concentrate on establishing her career.

In the beginning, everyone used to say 'Oh, you need to get married [again]!' and they used to be so worried. But now everyone's got used to seeing me... as a successful single career woman. Happy with her family, whatever she has... So I think everyone is now getting used to me as... as me. Over the years, everyone has accepted me... as I am. (Marisha, 38, UK).

A number of male participants also commented on the expected age at marriage, but admitted that they received less pressure than women, reflecting the clear gendered differences in the flexibility and time span of age norms. On the other hand, men said they felt pressure to be settled in a job, as they are expected to be financially responsible for their wife and children. Shaili (32, UK) claimed she objected to the traditional gendered age norms, but characterised these as inevitable: 'The point is, it's unfair to complain about gender, because the culture in India works in such a way'.

According to the participants, the ideal age at marriage is 25 for women and 30 for men. Male participants claimed that also they had faced pressures to conform to age-related cultural norms. Bharat (35, UK), explained that 'settling down at the right time is a cultural thing in India' and that this was the reason why he followed suit and got married at the age of 29. Aroop emphasised the involvement of the couple's parents in the timing of marriage.

Yeah, obviously you don't want to wait too long [to get married], uh... It's a taboo in India, you don't want to wait... when you are 35. They don't want to get you married when you're 35, they want to get you married... when you are 30, 31, earlier, as early as possible, so... I think another problem, I would say is... the traditions. The culture we follow is entirely different. My mum and dad are, like, involved in every decision we take. So that's the way it is, so... It's a bit different here, everyone is independent, you can take your own decision, you can do whatever you want. (Aroop, 28, UK).

After the marriage, the age- and timing-related life course expectations by parents and community were often shifted to childbirth. Similarly to postponing or not reaching union formation while developing professional career, the parental pressure for family formation can be counterbalanced by focusing on employment trajectory.

Yea, it [birth of the first child] was very late, compared to the Indian standard. Indian standard is to have a child within one year of marriage. So... we didn't have a baby until, uh, four years after marriage. People express doubt like... you know, why you're not having a baby? So we were in a bit of pressure. (Rakesh, 45, UK).

And it does help when you're living away [from the parents]. So you're not... right in front of them all the time. They know that we're working really hard and... (Sonal, 33, UK).

While Western women in their thirties are generally not regarded as too old to marry or have children, they are in India. Although the migrants are spatially away from India, they seem to have retained this mental construct. The relatively young normative age at marriage in India has persisted: the mean age at marriage for women was 21.2 years in 2011 and 19.3 years in 1990 (Census of India, 2011b). Previous research (Banerjee, 2006) has indicated that women who are over age 25 are perceived as too old for marriage. Deviation from the normative age at marriage is more likely to be accepted for men than for women

¹ All names of participants and places are fictitious in order to safeguard their anonymity.

(Leonard, 1976) due to linked norms on fertility and family formation.

4.2. 'Choosing for a PhD leads to bad marriage options'

Sanjita's experiences point to the decisive role of parents and community norms in women's access to higher education and migration. Acquiring career skills is more complicated for women from traditional backgrounds, because pursuing postgraduate education and/or a professional career is viewed as a hindrance to getting married, which has traditionally been a woman's central 'task'.

Sanjita is a PhD candidate in her mid-twenties who had been living in the Netherlands for a couple of years at the time of the research interview. She described her home village in India as a closed and highly conservative community. Her parents opposed her wish to enrol in graduate studies because then she would be unable to get married 'on time'. While it is becoming more common in India for women to earn a master's degree, in her village a bachelor's degree was considered sufficient. As women were expected to adhere to the traditional gender norms and become housewives rather than professionals, having higher education was consequentially regarded as just a formality. Generally, a woman's parents decide how much education she receives, and a woman's husband decides whether she is allowed to work outside the home. Sanjita repeatedly expressed her frustration with the extensive control her parents had over her life.

Sanjita's female friends from the village got married during their studies and eventually returned to the village to become housewives, despite their initial professional aspirations. She argued that a professional career should be every woman's personal choice, and not something that her parents or husband could forbid her:

I do not turn against parents or something... but if your marriage is a full stop for everything, then... then it's a kind of problem. Because I was also telling my parents that... if they look a match, a person for me, my feelings should be there. It's not like somebody... should not allow you, right, it's your right to... pursue your career or something. But, uh, it was not the idea of... people in my town.

As she had already struggled to persuade her parents to allow her to enrol in a master's programme, convincing them to permit her to apply for a PhD position—let alone abroad—had led to lengthy arguments. The problem was twofold: she was continuing her education at a level that was considered unnecessary for women, and was doing so while unmarried. In her community it was deemed unthinkable that a woman would 'risk' remaining single—a status that is looked down upon by others—in order to obtain a doctoral degree.

In Indian system marriage for girl is like... compulsory thing which we have to go through without that... you know, the people don't think the life is normal. So... I skipped it. For my PhD [laughs]. It was quite a big challenge in my life to convince my family, convince my relatives... You know, everybody. So that I can leave the country without marriage and... Actually they were not happy that I come here. Because I'm not married, they feel a bit insecure... how the life will be here and they're worried about the culture here and... how I will be influenced.

Sanjita's parents were concerned about finding a spouse for her after finishing her PhD, because by then she would have exceeded the normative age at marriage. She refused to get married during her PhD trajectory as she would have had to invest time in establishing the relationship and face the immediate pressure to start a family. Yet Sanjita observed that the same expectations do not apply to men.²

There's lot of difference in India, men and women are not the same, there starts the problem. Some people expect women should always be

dependent, so... If I'm working or if I have a career on my own, then I'm independent, right? It's changing a bit, I don't know when it will have change in my life.

Sanjita plans to return to India after finishing her PhD in order to pass on her knowledge and skills at a local university, and hopes to inspire other girls from village backgrounds to pursue higher education and a professional career. Nevertheless, she admitted she felt guilty when a female cousin had expressed a desire to pursue a master's degree abroad: 'Her parents were pointing to my parents "It's because of your daughter!" That hurts my parents'.

Mukta (26, NL) also struggled to get permission from her parents to pursue postgraduate studies at the cost of decreasing her marriage prospects. Mukta's parents were already looking for a groom, but she was eventually able to convince them that she needed to continue her education. Her parents were worried that she would be too educated and that they would not succeed in finding a husband, as many men in her community did not pursue higher education. In contrast, some male participants emphasised the importance of women's education and qualification levels when searching for a spousal candidate:

When I was looking for a girl [to marry], the main thing was that the girl should be working and she should be in a profession. I wouldn't have married a girl who was not going to work or... you know, just... take care of my house. Simply because my mum has been a working woman and I've seen that, I've actually grown up in that atmosphere. (Bharat, 35, UK).

Some of the male participants confirmed that it can be difficult for women to combine marriage and (post)graduate studies. This is largely because the traditional gender role distribution pattern—i.e., the woman is a homemaker and the man is a breadwinner—is particularly fixed in smaller communities, where female labour market participation is unaccepted. Working towards a PhD would not allow the woman to spend most of her time taking care of her husband and the family household.

So there's this social contract that women don't work and... If women do a PhD then I guess they will just not get married for a long time or even if they do, they expect their husband to move with them which is very hard, lot of compromises. (Rahul, 38, NL).

4.3. 'You make migration decisions based on the enemies you have'

Shaili's case study is revolved around the topics of social norms as push factors for migration and her experiences with labour market and citizenship based on marital status. Combining career and family life, and parental pressure to have children were also re-emerging issues.

Shaili is in her early thirties, has been living in the UK for four years, and works in the academia. She was always keen on studying at school to have better career prospects. During her high school years the IT boom started and education was 'suddenly all about migration. Suddenly, it changed in a way that if you're successful, you have to be abroad, you can't be in India'. Shaili, however, did not regard her education as means to leave India and completed two master's degrees there. In addition to working hard in her studies, she was engaged in various extracurricular activities and a busy social life. She also had a boyfriend, which caused her considerable problems because many people in her surroundings, particularly university staff, did not approve of having a pre-marital relationship.

Having become tired of facing the constant disapproval of others, Shaili did not hesitate to accept when she was offered a PhD position in France. Although she had not been seeking to emigrate, she felt she could no longer stay in an environment that is hostile towards young women. In discussing her decision to move to Europe, she commented wryly that sometimes '...you make migration choices based on the enemies you have' and where they are located. She enjoyed pursuing her PhD in

² In our earlier work (Authors, Year) we have elaborated on how female highly skilled migrants compartmentalise rather than have simultaneous life course events in parallel life course careers.

France, and appreciated that in Europe people did not concern themselves with her private life. After a period of time, she developed a relationship with a French man. Initially, Shaili's parents did not accept her choice of a non-Indian partner, but later they started pushing for the couple to get married. Shaili noted that her parents had wanted to arrange a marriage for her because their own union had been a love marriage, which was frowned upon in India at that time. Thus, they had been hoping to get into the good books of the community by ensuring that Shaili had an arranged marriage.

My mum was conservative in a way. Even if she had a love marriage and whatever, but then she... didn't want me to go that path, because she had to prove to the society that... she taught me good manners and... We got married in [year, month]. Which is too fast for my taste, but too late for my parents. I had no option. My mum said that if you want to have this relation, I want you to get married, otherwise it's not good in the society, people will think la-la-la-la and...

Her parents-in-law were not supportive either. Although from a Western society, their values were based on traditional gender norms, and they expected Shaili to stay home and take care of her husband. The nature of control from her parents-in-law pushed the couple to look for opportunities to work elsewhere in Europe. Shaili's strategy was to find employment on her own that would provide her a residence and a work permit, rather than to make use of her husband's citizenship and to migrate as a dependant. Eventually she got a job in the UK and her husband soon found a job nearby, so the couple moved together, with Shaili's visa being granted based on her own merits.

I was not wearing a rosy glass, well, I would get married, I will have European passport, I would sit and bake cakes and... I didn't come with that attitude, so... I told my husband that I want to go as a high-skilled migrant on my own, to a different country. Then only you can apply for job in that country, I don't want you go first, then I follow you. Because... people might think, you know, I have an advantage because of a European partner. And to me that was an insult. Because somebody is questioning the credibility of my work. So that was another reason why I wanted to leave France, because I felt like... I would be a second-class citizen who married a Frenchman, so I didn't have my own identity.

In the UK Shaili had to change jobs and move cities a few times because she had temporary contracts. She was concerned about being able to realise her career ambitions due to this lack of job security in academia, as well as the general challenge of combining a professional career and having children. She emphasised that she had been working hard to build up a career, and felt that having a child might jeopardise her work achievements at this stage.

I think there is a lot of pressure for females to be successful in both [career and family life] and there's no support really as such and... You can't be really out of the job market and enter the job market, especially in jobs like academia. [- -] As long as I don't have a permanent contract I don't think I want to sacrifice. I think if I know, say, I'm planning to get pregnant, I can 90 per cent guarantee that my contract might not be extended. So that's how I feel. I don't see any people having children and... I don't have the role models around me.

She reported, however, that her parents were constantly putting pressure on her to have a child because 'they're worried about their age, they're worried about my age, they're worried about society norms'.

Several topics related to migration and gender are illustrated in Shaili's story. First, social norms can act as push factors for migration, such as when social behaviour and adherence to cultural traditions are too strictly monitored and judged by the family and/or community. Many participants cited a desire for independence from their parents as one of the reasons they migrated (see Kōu, 2016). Several of them pointed to the influence of Western norms of pre-marital dating and cohabiting, which are slowly being adopted in India as well, although social control remains strong, also in urban areas.

The society structure in India and the West is completely different. There... if you have a girlfriend, you can live together, in the West. But not in our part of the world. Because we are a bit conservative. So staying with the girl means... people will start staring at you in different... And they will start making the story in their mind that you are doing this, you are doing that. (Pratul, 28, UK).

It's still common in India, to have arranged marriages. I think it depends on family, also what the family background is. Sometimes it doesn't really mean that people in modern cities, modern jobs... software, they are very free but... I don't think so. You also find people who are very highly educated, doing research and science, but still doing... following all the traditions. (Abishek, 28, NL)

Second, marriage to a non-Indian or a non-resident Indian can open doors to foreign labour markets. It should be noted that Shaili was unique as she had an explicit desire to be independent of her husband's legal status. The other female participants gladly used the spousal benefits associated with high-skilled migrant visa schemes.

Third, not just the age of the migrant, but the ages of their parents can put pressure on the timing of certain life events, particularly on having children. The parents may feel they are getting older and might miss out on seeing their grandchildren grow up, and social pressures often make them acutely aware of this issue. As some (mostly male) participants indicated, there may be less pressure on them if their siblings had already fulfilled their parents' desire to become grandparents.

Also the struggles stemming from combining work and family are illustrated here. The prevailing employment practices do not encourage women to take a long maternity leave, as a temporary gap in employment can have a negative effect on career opportunities. (Potential) employers had implicitly or explicitly discouraged women to have children, as experienced by Ritika (29, NL): 'And then [at the job interview] I was asked questions like, uh... Do you expect to have a baby... in two years of time? And after how long you want to continue working again? So... These questions gave me a hint that probably... employers want people who are... committed to their work'. In some cases, combining work and family was not encouraged by participants' in-laws. Marisha (38, UK) mentioned that her parents-in-law had been worried about her 'for being quite successful [at work] and travelling, and not doing stuff in the house'. However, some women approached the work-family balance in a more flexible way:

You're not going to end your career just because you're getting married, but... I mean if I have a child, priorities [will] change. I am career-oriented, I'm not denying that. But when... You know how hard it is to manage both your child and your work. It's really hard, so... I might just quit. He's earning the money [laughs]. I might as well stay at home. (Sonali, 33, UK).

4.4. 'I decided to take a break for the baby'

Ritika's story shows yet another side of the experiences of high-skilled spouses who co-migrate with their husbands. The role of Western norms in loosening traditional gender norms is exemplified here by the couple's household task division and gender expectations regarding work and childcare.

Ritika is in her late twenties, and had been living in the Netherlands for four years. She was finalising her second master's degree in India when her marriage was arranged. Her future husband soon got a job offer in the Netherlands, and Ritika joined him after graduating in India. She had been looking for a job in the Netherlands for half a year, but did not succeed because there were not many entry-level positions available during this period, shortly after the financial crisis. In addition, she needed to learn Dutch to work in her sector. Eventually she decided to enrol in another postgraduate course, and to work on improving her Dutch language skills.

Although Ritika had planned to work for about a year to settle into a career after she had finished the master's programme, she found out she was expecting a baby. She and her husband welcomed this unexpected turn in their plans. Ritika indicated that she very much appreciated her husband's support and his willingness to help with childcare and household tasks:

For instance, even if I am looking for jobs, even if I get a job in another city, he's ready to work for four days a week. He's ready to come early from the office and, you know, pick her up from a day care, or in the evenings, if I'm late, he is ready to take care of... So, that's a kind of understanding both of us have already.

The opposite was the case for Mohit, the only male participant whose wife was not highly skilled. His wife is a full-time housewife because she does not have the necessary skill set to participate in the labour market. The absence of family members, as well as no job or any other activities outside the house have isolated his wife, illustrating the importance of education or skills in migrant adaptation strategies, especially those of tied movers. Mohit explained he is not able to help his wife with childcare as he works long hours to be able to support the family sufficiently.

When she came here, she found herself very lonely... She was born in a big family in India and here she is just by herself in the house. Most of the time I'm out for work or meetings or other things... I cannot give her whole day, she is living by herself with the baby. It's difficult for her. She doesn't have anyone to discuss something or accompany her outside except me, so... Basically, her life is very limited. (Mohit, 25, UK).

Most of the married men in our study confirmed that their wife stayed home with the baby for at least half a year before looking to (re-) enter the labour market. However, the other female participant with children took maternity leave for a couple of months only because she wanted to continue to support her family financially and to avoid taking a long career break. When she returned to work, her parents(-in-law), who temporarily migrated from India, assumed the childcare responsibilities. It was also rare that men would consider taking paternity leave on a long-term basis even though such provision was available in the Dutch context.

Ritika's experiences emphasise that when the traditional division of gender roles and household tasks is loosened, men can help to ease the work-family conflict that women struggle with. Other men in this study also said they were willing to take on more responsibilities in the household, particularly after childbirth, so their wives would be able to work. Migration and exposure to Western norms can be seen as contributors to men's readiness to adopt new family roles.

She [wife] wants to stay [at home] with child. Uh, the minimum period she has to stay because child needs... mum, right? More than the father [laughs]. The initial period, maybe, six months. Of course, I'm going to be a good father, come on. I also will be helping her and... cooking food and support her. (Pratul, 28, UK).

Generally, the experiences of the participants suggest that women have to be more accommodating within the marriage. In addition to being primarily responsible for childcare, several male participants reported that their wives had given up their jobs in India in order to co-migrate. Even though nearly all of these women had found employment in the destination country, some were working at a lower position than in India.

It was my initiative [to move to the UK] and she [wife] likes staying back home in India. She's just here for me. It was difficult also for her to find a job and... she had to wait more than a year to get a job but... I have to say, she had a better job in India than in here. She could not get a job in the field she actually likes. It's still information technology but... she did not get the same position or same level of... job that she had in India. By UK standards she didn't get a good-paid job. (Prakas, 31, UK).

Rahul (38, NL) clarified that for dual-career couples it is difficult to co-migrate and that it is often the woman who makes concessions in the career, particularly in the Indian cultural context: *'For a man it's a lot easier. He will just say "Come on, let's pack our bags!" Most of the time women do'.* This is even more the case when the couple have children, however, his personal experience is the opposite: *'Even my father would sit at home and look after the kids, not always my mum did it'.* The same holds for return migration. Harish (41, UK) was about to move back to India with his family soon after the research interview. Whereas his wife was working part-time in the UK while also taking care of their children, the lack of childcare facilities and flexible working conditions prevented her from continuing working outside the home after returning. As Harish explained: *'Mine is quite a busy job, so... I will, I'll... leave my wife to do most of the... The work related to children she is going to sort out mostly'.* Although the couples seemed to divide the household and care tasks more equally when abroad, they were at risk of reverting to traditional gender roles in the Indian setting.

4.5. Gendered migration experiences of Indian women

Although the stories of the gendered migration experiences are presented through four cases, the quotes from the interviews with men and other women also showed similar patterns. A common theme in the stories of Veena, Sanjita, Shaili, and Ritika is their bifurcated approach to navigating gender norms. On the one hand they accept parental expectations to adhere to gender norms, and on the other they use their skilling or skilled status to find different strategies to postpone or combine entry into employment and household careers.

Sanjita seemed to be looking for a way to adhere to the cultural norms without giving up on her career; and Shaili fiercely protected her status as an independent skilled woman to resist being gender-stereotyped. These practices exemplify different approaches to negotiate between social expectations and personal aspirations. This negotiation can, however, result in either internal conflicts (such as Veena's contentment with the decision to pursue higher education and professional career on the one hand, and regret of having passed the 'right' age for marriage on the other hand) or external conflicts (such as Shaili's fight against gendered expectations in combining education or employment with a relationship). Whereas the traditional norms seem to prevail to a large extent, women actively find the middle ground due to their secured skilled status.³

Marriage proved to be the central point in most of the interviews. The experiences of almost all female participants reflected the tendency in Indian culture to see women not as independent agents, but as intrinsically linked to the identities of their husbands. For the parents, the stress on marriage and the normative age of marriage are connected to foundation of a new household to perpetuate the notion of family and kinship. Thus, in the eyes of the parents and society, a delay in marriage starts a chain reaction of delays in childbirth and other life course events necessary for retaining linkages across households, and impedes the shift to the next life stage for the parents. As the case of Veena showed, through international migration women can evade the obligation to get married and aim for professional fulfilment rather than family life.

In patriarchal societies like India, men enjoy more privileges. Although migration also relaxes gender norms, women are often still the ones who have to adapt. For instance, Ritika struggled to find employment in the new country, but in the family domain she was able to enjoy motherhood as her husband deviated from traditional gender norms and shared childcare responsibilities.

³ However, there were a few exceptions among the tied movers.

5. Conclusion

Our findings on the migration experiences of high-skilled Indian women highlight how gender, the high-skilled status and migration intersect at various points, creating a broad pattern of life course choices that lead to different trajectories. For many Indian women, migration represents an opportunity to escape from the pressure to follow normative paths and adhere to patriarchal norms. By intersecting theoretical concepts such as migration, gender and life course we contribute to the new theorisations on how skilling, skilled status and skilled migration provide men and women strategies to negotiate for postponing life course events such as marriage and childbirth. However, maintaining transnational linkages means taking on the normative baggage that comes with it (Kōu et al., 2017). Our study also shows how women blend tradition and modernity to retain a sense of control and independence to make their own life course decisions. This blending further extends our conceptual frame by decoupling the tradition-versus-modernity dichotomy to a more nuanced understanding of a negotiated modernity. In line with our findings, Pande (2015) comments that British-Asian women by adjusting arranged marriage practices engage in cultural negotiations rather than rejecting particular cultural practices ‘as mere signs of the hold of tradition and patriarchy on Asian women’s lives’ (p. 183).

We have also illustrated the multiple gendered movements. Women may take various steps towards freeing themselves from gender restrictions, by, for example, leaving their paternal home for education and employment. In traditional communities, the deep-rooted gender norms prescribe that every woman should follow—without resistance—the same path, namely, become a housewife. Although urban families are more open to Western values, they tend to have the same general expectations about marriage and children. To a certain extent, however, people who live in cities have more freedom than people in rural areas to shape their life course decisions and postpone those events. It is also important to note that the postponement of marriage may be partly attributable to family patterns in Asia, specifically to the lack of acceptance of cohabitation. However, even in an urban setting, women still tend to be very much defined through marriage. Our empirical material clearly shows that single women and divorcees are societally perceived to have an incomplete life, and thus hold a lower position in society. We add to the theoretical and empirical debates in gender studies by illustrating how women to a large extent feel the need to ‘compensate’ for being single by having a good education and/or an established career. By adopting alternative pathways and gender roles, and drawing on the dynamic aspects of culture, highly skilled women and men can thus to some extent reshape the traditions and values. Nevertheless, the normative age-restricted marriage market can make it difficult for Indian women above that age to find an Indian partner, whereas in Western societies age plays a less dominant role, and the partner market can be accessed over a longer life span.

The triple burden of migration, employment, and household was one of the central themes in the stories shared by our female participants. Balancing career and family trajectories is challenging, and the cultural context adds another layer of complexity. Loss of social networks due to migration often implies a larger burden of childcare for women (Meares, 2010; Salaff and Greve, 2004). While growing numbers of women are abandoning the traditional housewife role to pursue a career, they still need to devote time to raising their children. Based on a global sample of a multi-national company with employees in 79 countries, Martinengo et al. (2010) concluded that even in dual-career couples, women were still mainly responsible for household and care tasks. However, Rao (2014b, p. 883) observes that women have become home managers rather than service providers, ‘combining elements of modernity and tradition, individual interest and familial responsibility’. Our study also underlines the impact of institutional factors on efforts to achieve work-life balance. Whereas in the Netherlands women often have part-time jobs that make it easier for them to combine career and

childrearing, in the UK the labour market conditions are less flexible. In our earlier work (Kōu and Bailey, 2014; Kōu et al., 2017) we have pointed out the importance of (the duration of) parental visa, as the grandparents can assist with childcare and thereby enable the highly skilled female migrants to return quicker to the labour market. It is generally expected that work-family conflicts will be resolved at an individual rather than at the societal level, which reinforces ‘social assumptions that masculine career trajectories are the norm’ (González Ramos and Vergés Bosch, 2013, 626). The evidence for cumulative disadvantage (Purkayastha, 2005) in our findings is not straightforward. Although many female participants had encountered difficulties in establishing their personal and professional aspirations at different levels, our empirical material clearly demonstrates that women can defeat the barriers in institutional and family spheres by actively making use of their agency, despite cultural norms and social pressure. Migration can thus both facilitate and limit the professional development of women, particularly those from rigid patriarchal societies who are redefining the role of women in their society and setting examples for future generations.

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