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THESIS SUMMARY

‘Giving Back’: Diaspora Philanthropy and the Transnationalisation of Caste in Guntur (India)

This thesis is an anthropological study of a group of highly educated professional migrants who are deeply engaged in philanthropic projects for social development (especially in education, health and rural development) in their home region in southern India. Based on 15 months of multi-sited research carried out in India and the USA, it examines the discursive and processual aspects of these philanthropic practices to offer insights into the shaping of a transnational community that remains culturally and materially rooted in its home region and in regional social formations of caste, class and kinship. Diasporic members of this transnationalised caste, which emerged out of the agrarian landowning elite of Coastal Andhra Pradesh, fashion themselves as responsible ‘global’ citizens of India who are obligated to ‘give back’ some of the wealth that they have acquired through international migration to help ‘develop’ the community and region from which they come.

Drawing on the literatures on ‘migration and development’, transnationalism, and historical and anthropological studies of caste, exchange and reciprocity, the thesis attempts to understand the mechanisms and motivations behind diaspora philanthropy in Coastal Andhra, and to explicate its role in the formation of a transnational community that replicates local social relations across a transnational social field. It contributes to each of these sets of literature by examining the particularised ways in which this regional diaspora engages in cross-border philanthropy, and its discursive framing through analysis of migrants’ narratives about ‘bringing development’ to the region, doing ‘community service’, and engaging in philanthropy in an efficient and transparent manner to reach the ‘deserving poor’.

Although diaspora philanthropy is a recent phenomenon in Coastal Andhra, the thesis traces it to an older history of caste-specific ‘giving’ that emerged within the landowning agrarian communities of the region during the late colonial period, such as support for the education of youth. These practices were integral to efforts to promote caste consolidation and upward mobility, particularly for the Kammas, who created a self-representation as ‘a community that gives’, framed by a strong moral discourse of reciprocity and ‘giving back’. The history of outward migration of educated professionals from the region can be traced to the emergence of Guntur town as a key site that enabled Kammas to transform themselves from a regionally dominant caste into a well-educated, mobile and now transnational community. Consequently, the social lives of Kammas

(both in India and abroad) are infused with a transnational imagination and *habitus* that identifies transnational migration with social and economic mobility. This transnational aspiration does not exist in a deterritorialised imaginary space, however, but is spatially anchored in particular places such as Guntur town, which became a key pivot for this mobility pattern, anchoring and emplacing social relations on a transnational plane. Linking older forms of community giving to recent flows of transnational philanthropic resources, the thesis interprets the philanthropic engagements of the affluent Kamma diaspora (known as 'NRIs' or Non-Resident Indians) living in the USA as investments by and for a 'community' that is now spread across time and space. Inserting themselves within the global economy while remaining socially, economically and emotionally rooted in the home region, mobile Kamma professionals have reconstituted a sense of community in a transnational setting. Diasporic associations perform a key role in reconstituting new forms of transnational sociality, often overlaid on older regional and caste affiliations. These associations have also emerged as key sites from which professionalised and formalised practices of philanthropy emanate. The institutionalisation of philanthropy further re-embeds diasporic actors within their home region.

The thesis further shows how diaspora philanthropy became institutionalised within the local state in Guntur district and thereby implicated in local caste-inflected politics. It explores how the state has harnessed the resources of affluent migrants for local development projects, and conversely how transnational actors appropriate state agencies in the pursuit of their own agendas. While some diasporic engagements in the region were anchored in neoliberal government programmes that sought partnership with diasporic citizens for rural development projects, these projects were inextricably intertwined with an associational politics of differentiation (based mainly on caste and regional identities) within the Telugu diaspora. Thus, caste-based practices of 'giving back' legitimise the involvement of already powerful and mobile 'global citizens' in local politics and statecraft. The sinews of this caste community draw strength from political and financial strategies that weave together their embedding in the market and the local state, strategies that sustain ongoing processes of social, economic and spatial mobility. However, the intricate and elaborate networks that are woven by transnational philanthropy have shifted over time in response to the socio-political dynamics of the Guntur region and the state of Andhra Pradesh.

In summary, the thesis understands diaspora philanthropy in Guntur as a form of transnational (economic and symbolic) capital accumulation and circulation, mediated through caste networks and the local state. Through the philanthropic activities of a powerful regional diaspora, a highly stratified social field of power has been created that operates at several scales – local, regional and transnational.