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In this collection of columns Mario Rutten shows how his training in anthropology has shaped his interpersonal relationships and how he learns from everyday encounters. He describes people from the state of Gujarat in north-west India whom he befriended as a young researcher. He has continued to follow them and their children over the years – first in India, later also in London when they temporarily migrate there, and in the Netherlands when they visit him. With some his relationships are so close that they call each other brother, sister, uncle or cousin. In other columns, he discusses his colleagues and people he got to know during his research in Malaysia and Indonesia.

This anthropological view of the world around him is not confined to his work. Almost imperceptibly it carries over into his personal life and daily activities. For Mario Rutten, personal experiences are a source of professional reflection, and vice versa. Time and again his stories attest to this, whether they concern comments made by his Indian ‘brother’ or his son, or the lessons in observation learned from behind a camera.

Mario Rutten is professor of Comparative Anthropology & Sociology of Asia at the Department of Anthropology and the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam (UvA). He has been conducting fieldwork in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Britain since 1983.

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Preface

This booklet is a collection of short stories about people with whom I have interacted during my work as an anthropologist. I have been conducting long-term anthropological fieldwork in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and England since 1983. During these extended periods of research, I encountered many people – mostly informants but also academic colleagues – with whom I interacted on a personal level. These encounters gave me fodder for my research and insights into myself as an anthropologist at work.

In their professional lives, anthropologists study the cultural diversity and complexities of everyday behaviour and social life of small groups and communities. But in their personal lives, among relatives and friends, anthropologists operate as part of such small groups and communities, and so they gather all kinds of information during such interactions that can be relevant to their professional work. In a sense, anthropologists are therefore always part of a field that resembles a research setting. Work and leisure are thus closely interwoven, forming an essential part of an anthropologist's existence.

The main method of anthropological research is participant observation. Anthropologists collect information and insights by spending long periods of time with the people they study, observing them, asking them questions and participating in their daily lives. More than most other social scientists then, anthropologists are their own instruments of investigation. Their research tool is therefore always with them – on as well as off the field.

Given this close connection between work and daily life, and between research method and casual observations, it is surprising that anthropologists only rarely use their personal experiences for professional reflection. Anthropologists apply their observational skills to collect information during research but they hardly ever consider personal encounters with informants, family members and academic colleagues as worthy of anthropological introspection – something that this booklet attempts to remedy.

The stories in this booklet are meant to encourage anthropologists and other social scientists to use their professional skills during personal experiences, which will help them to contemplate their academic work and thereby to better understand the subject and object of their research. But the stories are not only intended to demonstrate how we can use personal encounters to reflect on anthropological research, they are also to entertain. I hope that lay and academic readers alike will enjoy them.

Before I conclude, a few words about the writing and production of this booklet are due. Between 2006 and 2015, I spent time reflecting on personal encounters I had during the course of my research in regular columns published in *CUL*, the student magazine of the anthropology programme at the University of Amsterdam. Here I present these columns, translated and slightly revised from the original Dutch. To protect the people described, I have used pseudonyms in a few instances.

The stories are written so as to be of interest to both anthropologists and general readers. They are grouped into four sections, but they can also be read individually.

The first section deals with family. These stories are partly about my own family members, some of whom accompanied me on my research trips. Sometimes their reactions provoked me into reflecting on my role as an anthropological fieldworker. The other stories in this section are about people in India, whom I have come to know intimately during my research over the past thirty years. These stories illustrate how we have become almost like family, but not without limitations given my ‘adopted’ status.

In the second section the focus is on the experiences of migrants. My research on international migration from India has acquainted me with many Indian migrants living in different parts of Europe and Asia. The stories in this section describe their everyday lives and past experiences: their hopes, struggles and despair. They show the intricacies of practising anthropological fieldwork.

The third section of the book consists of stories written over the years about academic colleagues in the Netherlands and in Asia – from my own university and abroad. In the margins of collaborative research projects and during conferences, I observed their behaviour and often learned about their life histories and daily experiences. The stories in this section are meant to provide a reflection on academic life from within.

The stories in the last section deal with a variety of topics. One story concerns the similarity between the social background of informants and myself as a researcher, another story focuses on marriage arrangements and my changing role in these over the years. The last two stories are about visual anthropology, more in particular about the relationship between filmmaking and anthropological research.

When I wrote the original columns, Rienke van den Berg and Sanderien Verstappen were always willing to give me feedback and make editorial suggestions. I would like to thank Rienke and Sanderien very much for their advice and comments over the years, although they are not responsible for any mistakes.

Anju Christine Lingham and Revathi Sampath Kumaran edited the manuscript with great care and I am very grateful to them for that. In the final stages, José Komen, Sanderien Verstappen, Willem van Schendel, Willy Sier and Rosanne Rutten took it upon them to turn the manuscript into a book. I would like to thank them very much for all their support and friendship.

Mario Rutten
September 2015

Family





Rienke with Santudas' wife Kokila at a wedding in Gujarat, India.



Lisa during New Year's Eve in Gujarat, India.



Daan with Santudas' brother Guru and sister-in-law Jaishri in Gujarat, India.



Huib in the Gujarat countryside, India.

my wife Rienke

‘We are not going to search for Gujaratis or Patels, mind you!’ my wife Rienke warned me at the beginning of our vacation in the USA in 2013.

Gujarat is one of the states in India from where many people have migrated abroad, especially to the UK and the USA. A large part of the Gujarati community abroad belongs to the Patel caste. Since 1998 I have conducted research among this community in England, but I had not yet had the chance to study them in the USA.

Rienke and I had come to the USA to visit our daughter who was an exchange student in San Francisco. After several days with our daughter, we travelled along the west coast of the USA for two weeks. Although Rienke has regularly travelled to Asia and we often have friends from India staying in our house, she insists that we try to keep work and life separately, especially during our holidays. She therefore prefers to spend our vacations in countries where there are less chances of meeting Indian migrants.

Rienke’s warning at the beginning of our trip was crystal clear: we are on a holiday and you are not going to try and start a conversation with every Indian migrant you can find in order to collect information! At that moment, I could not have possibly guessed that soon it would be Rienke who put me in touch with Gujarati migrants in the USA.

While we were visiting Yosemite National Park, an elderly couple asked Rienke to take their picture in front of a waterfall. After Rita and Shri had introduced themselves, Rienke asked them whether they came from India and

from where in India. Rita told us that she was born in Gujarat and came for studies to Nebraska in 1971. There she met her future husband Shri. Shortly after their marriage in America, Rita and Shri visited their families in India and realised that they did not want to return to India. They would rather build their future life in the USA: 'Already by then we had become so used to the American way of life that we did not see ourselves living in India again. We felt we would not be able to readjust to the fact that in India everyone always interferes in your life and that you can only get things done through contacts.'

When we exchanged our full names and addresses at the end of our brief talk, I noticed that Rita's surname was Patel. When I asked further, it turned out that her home village neighboured the village in which I have conducted research since 1983. I had stayed in that village before and happened to know her cousin. Rita was thrilled and invited us to come and stay with them in Los Angeles at the end of our trip. Surprisingly, Rienke immediately accepted their courteous offer. It was only later that I realised that she saw this as an opportunity to also visit Los Angeles during our trip, something we had not planned in advance.

When we stayed with Rita and Shri at the end of our vacation, I noticed that there was hardly anything in their house that could remind them of India or Gujarat. There were no objects or photos from India in the living room. In their way of dress and food preparation too, I noticed that there were hardly any Indian influences.

Rita told me how she and Shri had consciously decided to give their three daughters an American upbringing. They had taken that decision in 1972 after a conversation with Rita's friend's daughter, who had come to the USA as a young child. She told Rita and Shri that she was going back to India for further studies. 'Why do you do that?' Rita had asked her. 'It would make much more sense to do your studies here in America; the universities are much better over here!'

Her friend's daughter had answered that she wanted to return to India because the people there did understand her, and she did not feel at home in the USA. 'That was because my friend had given her daughter a traditional Indian upbringing. Shri and I then told each other: we don't want this to

happen to our daughters, they should feel at home here. We therefore decided that we should raise them as American children. At home we only spoke English. We also hardly went to meetings of the Gujarati or Indian community in our town. I used to find those meetings dreadful. Men and women would sit separately. Women would discuss the latest fashion and jewellery from India. Men would always be busy with America bashing, and they would emphasise the unwholesome influence of American society on Indian culture and the younger generation.’

It was because of Rienke that I came into contact for the first time with Gujarati migrants in America and even stayed with them during my holiday. So far, I had conducted research among those Gujarati migrants in England who remain closely connected to India, both in their views and actual behaviour. The decision of Rita and Shri to fully merge into American society added an interesting angle to my perspective on Gujarati migrants.

Rienke’s notion that work and life should remain separate as much as possible runs counter to what I used to learn as a student in anthropology/ development sociology. As part of the course in research methodology, we had to read C. Wright Mills’ book titled *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). In this book Wright Mills describes how good research not only requires intellectual craftsmanship but also a lifestyle in which there is no separation between work and private life. An anthropologist/sociologist always conducts research, is always busy collecting information and uses personal experiences to strengthen his/her intellectual work. It took some time to accept this, but after our vacation in the USA I am happy to see that even Rienke now seems to support this point of view!

my brother Santudas

‘Mario, what’s keeping you?’

It’s 6.30 pm when Santudas (65) calls me from his village. I left early in the morning on my scooter to the nearby town of Anand to interview returned migrants. It is already starting to get dark in the countryside of Gujarat (India) and it’s dangerous to drive after sunset on the inner roads where there are no streetlights. Over the past thirty years, I have got used to the fact that no one in India seems to follow traffic rules and that you constantly have to fight your way into the traffic. But I cannot get used to fact that at night cars and trucks drive with big headlights. Especially in the countryside I am always blinded for a few seconds whenever there is vehicle approaching from the opposite direction. It’s very dangerous, especially because often pedestrians and cyclists, without lights, are visible only when they are within the field of my scooter’s headlight and already very close. Whenever I come home to the village after dark, as a safety measure I follow some rickshaw or the other, hoping that the driver has more experience driving under these conditions. Santudas is therefore always worried when I have not returned home before dark.

I have known Santudas since my first visit to India in 1983. Whenever I conduct research in the countryside of Gujarat, I stay with his family which lives in a house on the edge of the village. A few years ago, Santudas decided to sleep in the office of his tile factory and I moved in with him. The office is small and the bathroom is old and dirty. Several times already I suggested to him that the bathroom be renovated at my expense, but he did not see the need for it. In 2012, I convinced him to have my own room built in one of the sheds on the factory premises. When I arrived the year after, nothing had

happened. But during my stay, Santudas called a constructor who made a tender. After I paid an advance, construction work began, with the plastering of the walls. When I returned in early 2014, Santudas proudly showed me the finished room, along with a new bathroom and toilet.

Every time I stay with Santudas he feels responsible for my well-being and thinks of my research as his own project that needs to be successfully completed. Before I arrive, he always gets my scooter repaired and makes sure that someone cleans my room. He also regularly gives me advice on how to keep my room tidy. He wants me to put my papers in order and he sometimes puts extra food on my plate whenever he suspects that I am not eating enough. Every time I give a lecture at one of the university colleges in the neighbouring towns, he tells me to dress up for the occasion. 'You can't really go like this to the city, Mario,' he remarks when he sees me putting on my casual shirt and pant. 'Wait here, I will first get one of your shirts and trousers ironed in the village.'

When I return in the evenings, I usually sit with Santudas on the veranda of his office. I tell him what I did all day and what kind of information I collected. He comments on my preliminary findings and ideas, and in between he often shares details about his own life history. When he was young, Santudas used to be a very difficult boy. He was expelled from school several times and could also not be controlled at home. At the age of fifteen, his father sent him away to stay with one of his uncles in south Gujarat. After some adjustment problems, the change did Santudas good and he quieted down somewhat. In the end, he returned to the village and got married in 1975.

When I first met Santudas in 1983, the family business was doing very well. They owned a good amount of irrigated land, a tile factory, a potato trading business, and a more recently built large cold storage. Following substantial losses in the potato trade in the early 2000s, the financial condition of the family became precarious. Since 2011, there has been hardly any production in their tile factory as the family has been unable to get cement on credit. When I once offered to lend Santudas some money for his business, he flatly turned it down. 'When people ask me who Mario is, I tell them Mario is my brother. I will not take money from you, we know each other for 30 years already and I do not want to jeopardise our relationship by borrowing money from you.'

Whenever I stay with Santudas in Gujarat, I try to use my close relationship with him to bring about changes in his behaviour. Santudas likes to drink whiskey and in large quantities. Gujarat is the only state in India where alcohol is prohibited. This doesn't mean that alcohol is not available, but that people drink secretly and often gulp it down quickly. Almost every evening, men from the village come to Santudas' factory office to sit and drink together, having strong discussions about anything and everything. Meanwhile, I try to write down my notes for the day.

Every now and then during my visits, I try to persuade Santudas to reduce drinking. He often drinks more than he should and it affects his health. When I point out that he should be careful with drinking so heavily at his age, he makes it clear that he does not want to talk about it. 'My family also does not like my drinking; that's why I moved to the factory office and sleep here. I am happy the way I am, so why should I change my behaviour?'

Santudas and I try to keep an eye on each other. He helps me in every way he can and tries to make sure that I clean my room and dress properly. For my part, I try to have him cut down the drinking. But it's an unequal battle. I am honoured that he considers me as a brother, but when I try to help or give him advice, he makes it clear that I am the *younger* brother. Being his younger brother I am not supposed to lend him money or tell him to stop drinking. But I do have to listen to my elder brother and make sure I am home before dark!

my daughter Lisa

‘It seems as if I have two dads: one the way you are in the Netherlands and one the way you are in India.’

This statement was made by my daughter Lisa (21) at the end of our trip to India in 2011. I had taken Lisa along during the Christmas holidays to show her my research area in Gujarat. Over the years she had met many people from India at our home, but she had never been there herself. I had expected that India would confuse her, as she is a young student enjoying the nightlife of Amsterdam. It certainly did, but in a different way than I had imagined.

Lisa had explored India for two weeks with an open mind. She enjoyed all the new experience – staying with friends in Mumbai as well as in the smaller cities and villages. The major contrasts and contradictions in India affected her the most, in particular between the rich and the poor, but also between modern and traditional life.

We celebrated New Year’s Eve in the village in Gujarat where I have been coming since 1983. Vishal (25), the nephew of my best friend Santudas, had invited us to a party that he had organised together with his friends and cousins in a factory at the edge of the village. Several of them had brought their sisters and female cousins along. Lisa enjoyed their company immensely. All the girls were dressed fashionably and had made themselves up beautifully.

‘It was just like being in Amsterdam with my girlfriends,’ Lisa recounted later that evening. ‘We talked about clothes and going out, and we made jokes about the goofy behaviour of the boys. Remember when at some stage a few

boys rode up in a rickshaw with dinner? All the girls laughed and told me: “These are clearly not *hifi boys* (modern boys) because otherwise they would have arrived on their own motorbikes.” It felt just like in the Netherlands.’

But when we sat down for dinner Lisa knew that we were not in Amsterdam but in a village in India: ‘I found it so strange that girls went to sit separately at the other side of the shed. And when they turned on the music, we did not dance together. Instead, the boys danced while the girls just sat and watched them. It is at those moments that I do notice it is still very different here compared to the Netherlands.’

Lisa was fascinated by the way in which the people in India seemed to naturally combine tradition and modernity in their lives. ‘People here are sometimes just as hurried as in the Netherlands, but they do take the time to relax each and every day. Vishal’s father and mother pray extensively in front of their house altar every morning, while others take the time to do yoga in the evening. On the one hand I feel like I am walking around the Fata Morgana in the Efteling (Dutch amusement park), with all this traditional clothing that the people here wear, while on the other hand I feel as if I am in the Netherlands when I see the modern clothes of some people.’

Lisa did not experience this mixture of modernity and tradition as problematic; instead she saw it as an interesting experience. What she did see as a problem were the contradictions in my behaviour. She pointed this out for the first time during our stay in the village with my friend Santudas, Vishal’s uncle. Their family consists of four generations; thirteen people in all, living together in one house. Lisa was surprised to find that I knew everyone by name and had also brought gifts for everyone. Santudas turned 63 during our stay and I had brought him streamers, flags and other party decorations from the Netherlands. ‘Here you have plenty of time for family and you even like going to weddings and ceremonies, yet in the Netherlands you sometimes do not even feel like dealing with birthdays of family members. In the village you know everyone by name yet in the Netherlands you sometimes even forget the names of my cousins,’ Lisa asserted.

Therefore, when I asked Lisa at the end of our trip what had surprised her most about India, Lisa did not discuss the contradictions between modernity

and tradition, but instead answered: 'how different you are in India compared to the Netherlands.' I had brought my daughter to India to teach her something about Indian society, instead she had taught me something about myself and the role that an anthropologist takes when conducting fieldwork. In every methodological handbook there are discussions about the dual role of the anthropologist who participates and observes during research, yet relates to informants from both an 'emic' as well as 'etic' perspective. However, there is little attention given to how differently an anthropologist can behave with his or her 'family' in the research field as compared to his or her own family back home. My daughter Lisa pointed this out to me in unmistakable terms.

my nephew Vishal

I have known Vishal since he was born, in 1984. At that time I was living in his village, doing research for my master's thesis. Vishal is the youngest son of a wealthy farming family. After he got his bachelor's degree in applied computer science in India, he went to Australia in 2006 to do a master's programme. After six months he was back again in India. 'Australia was nice, but studying doesn't mean anything to me,' he told once.

From Australia, Vishal had proposed to his girlfriend Komal, whom he had met during his bachelor's study in Gujarat. Komal was staying in England at that time, where she had gone on a student visa. It had never really been her intention to study. She just wanted to live abroad for some time and earn some money. So, she had enrolled in a small university in London, choosing it particularly for the low fees they charged.

Komal made a brief trip to India in 2007, during which she and Vishal got married. This facilitated Vishal's entry into England on a 'dependent visa'. Komal had already arranged a room for them in a house with ten other Gujarati youngsters. After spending the first few weeks working in a supermarket, Vishal found a job in a sandwich bar owned by a son of a Gujarati migrant. He felt very comfortable in his new work place, and enjoyed both the work and the new learning experience.

Vishal loves to make sandwiches and Italian pasta, and to prepare different types of coffee for the customers. 'I really like to prepare food and to serve people,' he said when I visited him in his shop for the first time. 'As you can see for yourself, the customers are very friendly. Most of them are British, and

they always say “thank you” when I give them food or coffee. That never happens in India. When I go back to India, I want to start a sandwich bar myself and give the same kind of service to customers as here in England,’ he explained.

Vishal not only enjoys his work in London, he also enjoys being with Komal. After work they are together all the time; when they are outside the house they always hold each other’s hands, and in the kitchen they often sit on each other’s lap. ‘Back home that’s not possible,’ he told me, at various times. ‘You know how it is in India, we’re never alone, there are always relatives or friends milling around, and in public it’s not appropriate to hold hands.’

In other ways too, much has changed in Vishal’s life since he came to London. The relationship with his elder brother Darshan, who had come to London soon after him, has gone downhill and there have been quite a few showdowns over the past few years. In the first few months after his arrival in London, Darshan was jobless, which made him financially dependent on Vishal. This was a novel phase in their relationship. Thus far, Vishal had always had to be subservient to Darshan who, because he was elder, was constantly advising Vishal about how to behave and what to do. Ever since he arrived in England, Vishal has had the freedom to do as he pleased; he even had his elder brother financially dependent on him for a while.

However, after a few months, Darshan managed to find an office job. His self-confidence restored, he went back to being the assertive elder brother. But Vishal refused to accept Darshan’s attempt to try to run his life, and expressed his displeasure openly: ‘Darshan keeps on nagging. He thinks my job is too low because I work in a sandwich bar. He tells me almost every day that I should also search for an office job, like he has. I think that’s nonsense. I really like my work and I intend to open this type of sandwich shop when I return to India, but Darshan thinks it’s not worth it. Serving people is below our dignity, he says, and there’s no career possible, as there’ll be no promotion in this job.’

The two brothers were also constantly at loggerheads over money. Darshan felt that Komal and Vishal were spendthrifts. ‘You’ve got a second chance after your stint in Australia, don’t waste that chance,’ Darshan kept telling his

brother. Vishal, on the other hand, regarded Darshan as overly concerned with saving money: 'He has no life here in London, he only works and works, and tries to spend as little money as possible. Of course, I also want to save money, but I also want to enjoy life in London,' he said.

In the end the situation became so unbearable that Vishal and Komal left the house without informing Darshan in advance, and moved into a new, rented apartment which they shared with two other couples from Gujarat. A stunned and disappointed Darshan immediately called his mother in Gujarat. All she could do, across the distance, was to listen to Darshan's outpouring and ask both her sons to keep in touch with each other.

Darshan called me too in Holland and told me how miserable he felt. In view of the seriousness of the situation, I decided to meet Darshan and Vishal and arranged to spend a few days in London for this purpose. I had several conversations, separately, with each of the brothers. To Darshan, I was his Indian 'uncle'. 'You know our family very well and you also know that what Vishal has done goes against our Indian culture,' he reasoned. I sympathised with him and told him that I fully understood his point of view, but I also advised him to give Vishal the space to grow. 'If you do so, he will listen to you again in the end,' I said.

To Vishal, I was his Dutch 'uncle.' 'You understand how I feel and you know that Darshan must not constantly tell me what I should do. I want to live my own life like you people do in Europe, and I don't want to be forced to listen to my brother all the time,' he contended. I supported Vishal's views and told him that I appreciated his need for more freedom, but I also asked him to keep in touch with Darshan.

There wasn't much else that I could do. Not only were Vishal and Darshan having problems reconciling the impact of Indian and Western cultures in their lives, I too was in a bind, trying to play a double role as the Western as well as the Indian 'uncle' of my two 'nephews', in addition to being an anthropologist!

my son Daan

‘This way Daan gets to see modern India for a change, and not just those villages in Gujarat you take him to,’ Pranav said with a smile. Pranav and his wife Parul had taken my son Daan (17) and me for an evening out to the Hard Rock Café, Mumbai (Bombay). It was Daan’s first visit to India and during our days in Bombay we stayed with Pranav and Parul. Daan had already met them several times since they had stayed with us during their visits to the Netherlands. Each time they had insisted that I take Daan to India at least once. The Christmas vacations during his final year in high school in 2006 had seemed like a good time to show Daan my research area in Gujarat. The idea was that such a trip would give him a chance to experience a world different from what he was used to. What I had not envisaged was that it would give me too a chance to sharpen my understanding of anthropological research.

During our two weeks in India Daan adjusted easily. With casualness, he took in the new experiences. He ate everything offered, and was clearly enjoying the trip. He got along well with his peers, mostly sons and daughters of friends I had known for years. They talked about music, leisure activities, and future plans. Sometimes they invited him to hang out with them and every now and then I was allowed to join.

Entering Hard Rock Café in Mumbai it struck me that I was one of the few people over forty years of age around. Even though it was a weekday, the place was teeming with more than two hundred young Indians. A glance at the menu revealed that most of them must have high incomes. The cheapest cocktails were € 5,50 each, a small fortune in a country where the salary of a labourer is often less than € 1,00 per day.

As the evening progressed, we met a few of Pranav and Parul's friends. Just like Pranav and Parul, they were all in their early thirties, and worked in the stock market or were employed in an ICT company. Both these sectors have grown tremendously since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early nineties. The salaries and bonuses can be very high, even by European standards. 'But it's hard work and we make very long hours,' one of Pranav's friends told us.

Young people like Pranav and Parul represent the 'new and shining India,' which has provided the wealthy middle class clientele for the Hard Rock Café in Mumbai. The outlet, established in September 2006, was the first of its kind in South Asia. Its location is linked to the downside of India's economic liberalisation. Hard Rock Café is situated in the former factory hall of the Bombay Dyeing mill. Established in 1879, Bombay Dyeing used to be one of the largest textile companies in India. Until 1980, more than 300,000 people worked in the textile industry in Bombay. Today, there are few textile factories left with a workforce of no more than 25,000 labourers.

As a result of the liberalisation policies, cheap textiles from China and Vietnam became available, leading to the collapse of Bombay's textile industry by the end of the twentieth century. The underlying cause of the rapid decline was the reluctance of the factory owners to invest in new technologies. A long-drawn strike that lasted for more than eighteen months in the early 1980s could not turn the tide. The vast majority of the labourers were laid off without any compensation. However, factory owners were left with substantial sums of money after selling off the landed property and factory buildings. Most industrial sites were turned into expensive apartment buildings and shopping malls, while art galleries, restaurants and ICT companies were set up in the old factory halls.

In the same factory where looms once clattered noisily for almost a century, rock & roll music now blasted through the speakers. While globalisation has created the prosperous clientele of Hard Rock Café, it has also led to poverty amongst large numbers of labourers and their families. When I made a remark about this to one of the friends of Pranav and Parul, he reacted dismissively. 'They have nothing to do with each other,' he replied and swiftly changed the subject.

On the way back to Pranav and Parul's house I pointed out to Daan the contradictions inherent in development in India, adding that the middle class does not like to be confronted with this reality. He listened attentively, but did not react. The next morning he returned to the topic. Yet his reaction was not what I had expected. 'You know what I think the definition of an anthropologist is?' Daan asked during breakfast. 'An anthropologist is someone who stays with people in their houses, enjoys their hospitality, and then writes about them critically afterwards.'

At first, I protested, but later I realised that he was kind of right. Perhaps even spot on. His remark reminded me of a statement by André Köbben, a professor at the Anthropology department of the University of Amsterdam during the early 1970s. In his 1991 book *De Weerbarstige Waarheid* (The Obstinate Truth) he wrote that an anthropologist is not always honest and sincere during fieldwork: 'Trickery and deceit are part of the basic toolset of the anthropologist, or in other words: *pia fraus*, pious fraud. In that sense he is just like any human being.' Daan had drawn a similar conclusion.

my sister Utpala

Just after I landed in Ahmedabad (India) in 2012, I received a phone call from Utpala (58). ‘I am on my way,’ she told me. ‘Wait when you get out of the terminal, I will drive by the exit and pick you up.’

It was good to see Utpala after almost a year, but she had no time to exchange pleasantries as I sat down in her car. She almost immediately started to talk about the miserable period her family had gone through over the past year. ‘It was a living hell, we suffered so much; it was terrible. I was so glad when you called me in November, because I was desperate then and did not see a way out. But now it is finally all over.’

For the whole evening, Utpala talked about almost nothing but the marriage problems of her son Rakesh. Her husband Dilip had gone out of town for work and would only be home the next day. The problems of the past two years had affected Dilip’s health. He did not want to be reminded of it all. That was the reason Utpala used our first evening to tell me what had happened. After Dilip’s return the next day, we would not be able to talk about it openly.

Utpala and Dilip, both well-educated, had their only child Rakesh at a relatively late age. During my regular visits to their house over the past 25 years, I saw how hard it was for Rakesh to fulfil the high expectations of his parents. Growing up under the wings of his loving but dominant mother made it difficult for him to grow into an independent individual. After his graduation, Rakesh got a job in Surat, a city four hours away from Ahmedabad. He moved to Surat and each time I was in Gujarat I tried to meet

him. He obviously enjoyed living on his own in a new city, although he regularly visited home.

Shortly after Rakesh had moved to Surat, Utpala and Dilip began to pressure him to get married. 'Rakesh is already 26 years of age and in India that means you are getting old and it's time to get married,' Utpala had once said to me. Through a friend they were approached by a family from Ahmedabad who had a daughter to be married. The parents told Utpala their daughter Sujata had a job in Hyderabad but felt lonely over there. They hoped that by marrying Rakesh, Sujata would come and live nearer to her family home. After two meetings and a brief engagement period, Rakesh and Sujata got married.

'I was so happy,' Utpala remarked. 'When Rakesh was born several friends told us to take a second child because that might give us the pleasure of having a daughter. But I did not want a second child. I thought: why should I again go through the pain of delivery to get a daughter who in the end would marry and stay with her in-laws? No way! I always used to tell my friends: I will automatically get a daughter when Rakesh gets married. After their marriage, I therefore gave Sujata the special necklace that my mother had given me when Dilip and I got married.'

Soon after the wedding, things started to go wrong between Rakesh and Sujata. During their honeymoon in Goa, Rakesh found out that Sujata had habits that his family would not tolerate girls having: she smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. Rakesh was shocked, but he decided not to tell Utpala and Dilip, knowing that his parents would find it impossible to understand. He hoped to change Sujata's behaviour, but that hope turned out to be in vain.

The situation turned worse when he found out that Sujata had had a boyfriend in Hyderabad whom she was still attracted to. Rakesh had secretly read her diary and had thereby also come to know that her parents had pressured Sujata into accepting the marriage. Her father had even threatened to kill himself if she refused. Shortly after their marriage, Sujata told Rakesh that she was pregnant. Rakesh was convinced it could not be his child and he therefore decided to tell his parents. After lengthy deliberations, Utpala and Dilip decided that Rakesh should ask for a divorce.

‘From that moment onwards, we went through a living hell,’ Utpala said. ‘Sujata’s family made an official complaint to the police. They accused Rakesh of harsh psychological violence against Sujata, while Dilip was accused of asking for a dowry. They accused me of having attempted to murder my daughter-in-law by putting poison in her tea because her family was unwilling to pay the full dowry. It was horrible. And especially because when it comes to dowries the police is always vigilant. Several times we were summoned to the police station and interrogated for hours on end. People that we thought were our friends no longer wanted to have anything to do with us. Each time we asked them if they could accompany us to the police station, they informed us that they had another pressing engagement.’

Dilip could no longer cope with it all. He went into a depression and once even he left the house for several days without informing Utpala. Luckily they were finally able to find a good lawyer who managed to get Sujata’s family to drop the indictment of dowry. After several months, they reached a settlement in court and had to pay 150,000 rupees (€ 2,500) to Sujata’s family as compensation. Sujata and Rakesh got divorced. In the meantime, Sujata had an abortion.

When I met Utpala, she was relaxed and relieved it was all over. She said she realised that from now on she needed to give Rakesh more space: ‘I no longer want a daughter; I want a daughter-in-law. It is not important whether Dilip and I like her, but Rakesh should be happy with her.’

Later during my stay, Utpala told me that Rakesh had found a girl whom he wanted to marry. Despite good intentions, she could not stop herself from interfering. She remains convinced that a marriage is best arranged by the parents. She confronts her son with all kinds of questions about the girl’s background and family, and she was not happy when Rakesh told her not to intrude in his marriage plans. When she found out that I was going to visit Rakesh during my stay in India, she asked me to persuade him to allow her to gather more information about the family of the girl before he takes a decision: ‘We know each other for so long, I feel like you are my brother. You are like an uncle to Rakesh and he will certainly listen to you.’

Two weeks later I met Rakesh in Surat and asked him to give the relationship time to develop, but I could not bring myself to ask him to involve his mother, my 'sister' Utpala, more directly before taking a decision about the marriage. Being born and raised in the Netherlands, to me a marriage is a relationship between two individuals and not two families. Utpala as a mother wasn't the only one trapped in her cultural background; I, despite being an anthropologist, can also not escape my own cultural upbringing.

my brother Huib

I have never seen my brother's back as often as during our trip to India in January 2008. Huib is a photographer and for many years already we had talked about doing a photo project on Western influences in India and Indian influences in the Netherlands. Early in January we left for India for the first part of our project. For three weeks we visited cities and villages, mainly in Gujarat where I had been conducting research over the past 25 years. It was Huib's first visit to India. From the start he stared his eyes out and was constantly taking photos. My job was to find good locations, make contacts and to try to stay outside the frame. I often stood behind him and looked over his shoulders. After some time in India, Huib preferred to walk around by himself, while I would sit somewhere nearby catching up with backlog reading work.

It was nice to be together for several weeks and I learned a lot from the experience. The longer we worked together on the project, the more aware I became of the similarities between a photographer's and an anthropologist's approach. Huib used to spend most of his time waiting – waiting for the right moment to take the right photo. Although it is hardly ever discussed in handbooks on anthropological methodology, waiting is one of the most important activities of an anthropologist during fieldwork: waiting to get access, waiting until an informant has time for you, waiting during a long conversation until you finally get the information you are looking for.

During our three weeks in India, Huib took several thousands of photos. At the end of each day he would transfer pictures taken onto his computer. In preparation of the work that was waiting for him at home in the Netherlands

– selecting and editing the photos – Huib used to closely check his material at the end of each day. On the basis of his analysis, we made a plan for the following day. I would sometimes look over his shoulder to see what he was doing, but this made Huib uncomfortable. ‘Nobody ever sees this material,’ he said several times. ‘Others only see the photos that I have selected and edited. The photos that you now see are not meant for others. There are many photos among these which I already know are not good enough even when I am clicking it. I shoot these photos to make people feel at ease or to test the light. In the end we will only use a few of the several thousands of photos that I have now stored in my computer.’

Following Huib’s remark, I was reminded of the many boxes with interviews and notes in my room at the University of Amsterdam, of which only a very small part ever made it into my books and articles. Just like Huib needs to shoot a large number of photos to make a good selection, I need many observations and conversations with people to be able to build up a valid argument. And like Huib, my original notes and observation reports are not always meant to be read by others. Part of it I write down as a finger exercise, some remarks are meant for me only, while a lot of the data and thoughts that I note down turn out to be wrong later during my research, when I get additional information.

During our trip, Huib took the most beautiful photos when he had the right contacts. In such situations he was able to become very close to the people who were the subjects of his photographs so he could hang around long enough to click when the moment was right. This was especially the case when we stayed with my friend Santudas in his village.

Shortly after our arrival, Santudas had decided that Huib needed the same help that he has always given me whenever I conducted research in Gujarat. It almost seemed as if Santudas also noticed the similarities in approach between an anthropologist and a photographer. He helped us with the necessary contacts, so that Huib could take the photos he wanted. And like he always does with my research projects, Santudas also turned Huib’s photo project into his personal project that he proudly wanted to show to others. He took Huib everywhere and always introduced him as ‘the famous international photographer from the Netherlands.’

Santudas's help though had a flipside that I had recognised during my earlier visits. Santudas likes to help, but he is sometimes a bit too eager to provide assistance. If I let him have his way, he decides whom I need to interview, what I need to ask the person, and if possible, he will also try to answer for the person. When we visited a hospital in a neighbouring town, Huib was also confronted with this side of Santudas's help.

While walking through the corridors of the hospital, Huib saw a beautiful image in one of the rooms. Around the bed of a sick boy, a family of ten people had gathered. It was a relaxed atmosphere in which everyone was doing their own thing: some relatives sat on a chair and talked to the patient, others were eating food that they had brought from home, two children played under the bed, while an elder relative was napping on the floor. The picture resembled that of a living room rather than a hospital ward and Huib wanted to take a photograph.

However, Huib soon discovered that Santudas had a very different view of this image. He saw an unorganised group of people who did not pose for a portrait and he wanted to help out. Before Huib could focus his camera, Santudas ran past him and immediately started to arrange everyone next to each other. Huib first tried to stop Santudas, but he quickly realised that the image was lost. After having placed everyone in place Santudas proudly looked towards Huib.

Despite his disappointment, Huib took a few photos of the scene that Santudas had created for him. These photos will certainly not pass the selection. They are part of the large amount of material that a photographer, like an anthropologist, needs to complete a project. To achieve that goal, part of my job was not only to stay out of the picture myself, but also to distract my overenthusiastic friend Santudas, to make sure that Huib could take the photos he wanted.

Migrants





Darshan and Pinal in London.



Sohang in London.



Young Gujaratis in front of their house in London. From left to right: Vishal, Komal, Jignesh, Dhruti, Pinal, Chetan, Darshan, and Sohng.



Sheela (fifth from left) at the Diwali festival in Zijderveld, the Netherlands.

Darshan

ambivalent feelings

Darshan (26) has been living in London since 2007. He stays in a paying guest accommodation in Upton Park, a low-class neighbourhood, together with eleven other youngsters, including his younger brother Vishal and Vishal's wife, Komal. All of them have migrated from middle towns and villages in Gujarat, northwest India. Their house in London has five small bedrooms, but only one bathroom and one kitchen. Darshan shares a room with two others and their small bedroom seems overfull with three beds squeezed in.

The congested living quarters in London is a far cry from Darshan's spacious village home in Gujarat. His father and uncle are wealthy farmers who own large swathes of irrigated farmland, and a small floor tiles factory as well. They live as a joint family of nine people in a bungalow at the edge of the village. The house has a large living room, five bedrooms and three bathrooms, besides two large kitchens with dining tables.

When I met Darshan in 2005 in Gujarat, he was working as a project manager in a large insurance company. He took me to his office and proudly pointed to a framed certificate hung on the wall behind his desk: it commended him for having been the best salesman of life insurance policies in his region that year.

In 2006, Darshan decided to apply for a High Skilled Migration Permit to England. Why did he give up a fairly established career in Gujarat and move to London? 'I wanted to get more management experience by working in a

modern company abroad,' he told me. 'I thought that would help me later in India, to make further progress.'

Darshan reached England in 2007, but soon realised that he would not be able to get the kind of job he had hoped for. In fact, during the first few months of his stay in London he was unable to find any work and was at home for most part. Not only was it a new and unpleasant experience to be unemployed, it was also distressing to be financially dependent on his younger brother, Vishal. Darshan found the reversal of roles with his sibling very difficult to accept and began helping out in the catering company of an acquaintance from Gujarat during the weekends in order to earn some money.

Over the next five months Darshan applied to all kinds of companies and finally landed an office job. He works in the purchase department of a car parts company owned by an Indian migrant. 'My job is to take orders from our salesmen and to enter them into the computer,' he explained. 'I work very hard and I want to become the best in my department. I'm happy that I got this job, but it's much lower work than what I used to do in India.'

During each of my visits to London, whenever we got together, Darshan indicated that his high expectations of England have not been met. He is somewhat disappointed with the outdated work methods of his office: 'When they send orders from my company here in London, they still do it by fax, while in Anand (Gujarat) I always used a scanner,' he said. He is also unhappy with the discriminatory practices of his boss: 'Those (white) British who work in my company never have to work on Saturdays. The boss knows that there's no point in asking them. As Indians on a temporary visa we can't refuse; we have to work every other Saturday, and without extra pay. We're being exploited, and by someone from our own country at that.'

In his village, Darshan was part of a group of middle-class Hindu youngsters who dominated the village square in the evenings, often in a loud way. In London he lives on the margins of society. His distaste for the locality in which he stays is obvious. On our way home from shopping on Green Street one day, Darshan said, with a grimace, 'Upton Park is a Pakistani neighbourhood with only Muslims,' and added, 'As soon as I earn a bit more, I want to move to a better neighbourhood like Wembley where many Gujaratis live.'

Although Darshan has left India, temporarily as he would have us believe, Gujarat's hold on him continues to be strong. He calls home at least a few times every week, and the conversations often run to an hour or more. His mother regularly sends him chocolate powder, clothes and homemade pickles. Every evening he prays in front of a makeshift temple in his bedroom, and his thoughts unfailingly reach out to his family. He also transfers money to his family whenever possible, and donates towards religious rituals in his home village.

Darshan's strong linkages to Gujarat are not only material; his social behaviour is also reminiscent of his upbringing and the values he imbibed while growing up. Having overcome the initial financial dependence on Vishal, Darshan has reinstated himself as the 'mota bhai' (elder brother), telling Vishal what to do and what not to. He also acts as 'mota bhai' to some of the other youngsters in the house. For instance, he helped one of them get a job in his company; most often, he is in charge of their joint outings on Sundays and decides the destination. He also pays for the food and drinks of his friend Budo, who hails from the same home village in Gujarat and who has been an illegal migrant in London for several years already. In return, Budo runs all kinds of errands for his benefactor. Being the 'mota bhai' is important for Darshan as it has helped him regain his self-confidence and acquire a position of some status in his London home.

Darshan's move to foreign shores has resulted in his upward, and paradoxically, downward social mobility as well. He lives in a smaller house and in a lower-class neighbourhood than he used to back home, and he performs lower status work than he did in India. At the same time, he is admired by his family and friends in Gujarat because he now lives in London. During my visits to Gujarat over the past few years, I have noticed that everybody at home follows his achievements with pride. Besides, within his small circle of Gujarati friends in London he has acquired some kind of leadership position.

'Despite all the problems I'm happy I came to London, but I don't want to stay here too long,' Darshan explained one evening. It seems to be a tacit admission of his unease with the simultaneity of his social decline and social ascent. It is also a reflection of his ambivalent attitude towards his migrant

status: he neither seems to have truly left India nor settled down fully in London.

Pinal

tenacity

Pinal (26) has been in London since February 2009. We met her for the first time in December 2008 in India, around the time when she was to marry Darshan. In fact, we were in Gujarat to film their wedding for our documentary. 'I have always dreamed of going to London,' she told us back then. 'Ever since secondary school, I've been in love with Darshan and I very much want to be with him in London. From now on, we'll always be together.'

For a long time it had seemed as if the marriage between Pinal and Darshan would never come to pass. Pinal's family, as also Darshan's, belong to the same caste of Patels, but they also belong to the same village. Within the Patel community, intra-village marriages are taboo. Consequently, both their families were strongly against the alliance. In fact, when Pinal's parents found out that their daughter had fallen in love with a boy from their own village, they were furious. They forbade her from associating with Darshan and closely monitored her movements. When a family member reported that he had seen Pinal and Darshan together in a nearby town, Pinal's parents decided to confine her to the house until she agreed to give up the idea of marrying Darshan.

Pinal's parents, however, had underestimated her tenacity. She went on a hunger strike and refused to eat. Initially her parents thought that she would soon come around and accede to their desire to marry a boy from outside their village. However, ultimately, it was the parents who were forced to

reconsider their decision. They learnt that a girl of the Patel community in a neighbouring village had committed suicide because her family opposed her desire to marry a boy from a different caste. The news came as a shock to Pinal's parents, who knew the girl's family well. Fearing that their daughter would take a similar step, they quickly got in touch with Darshan's parents who were also opposed to the match. After weighing the options, the latter also gave in, deciding that a loss of face within the community was preferable to something worse.

'It was a very difficult decision for our parents,' Pinal told us. 'In our village, a boy and a girl from the Patel community have never married each other. Darshan and I will be the first to do so. After our wedding I'll go to London. I'm sure I'll get a good job there and be happy.'

Reality, however, belied Pinal's expectations. In India, Pinal's family belongs to the upper class in her village. They own a good acreage of fertile agricultural land, and are co-owners of a large cold storage. They live in a new bungalow in which Pinal had her own bedroom with an attached bathroom. Other than studying, Pinal had little to do, and she would zip around on her moped, visiting friends in her spare time. In contrast, besides finding her London home small and dirty, she felt miserable that other youngsters in the house kept urging her to 'take responsibility' and 'find work.' Darshan had prepared her to an extent for the life she could expect to be leading in London, but she had never imagined it would be so very different from her life in India!

When we visited Pinal in London a few months after her arrival, she complained a lot about the circumstances in which she lived. During our visits in the subsequent months, we often found her crying. After some time, she managed to find a job that required her to work behind the counter of a small shop owned by a Gujarati, for a salary of twenty five pounds per day. When she professed reluctance to take up this kind of menial job, the others in the house told her: 'You better take it, because it will help cover at least your own expenses.' 'But how will I get there?' she protested, to which Darshan promptly replied, 'By bus, because that'll save money.' Pinal didn't say a word but simply stared into the distance, sulking. In the end, she gave in, but only to leave the job after two weeks.

On our subsequent visit to London, we found Pinal looking happier. She had found work as a carer for aged people, besides which her position in the house had also changed from a fresh migrant to a more experienced one. A new couple, who had just arrived from Gujarat, had become part of the household. The girl, Sittal, was pregnant, and her husband had yet to find a job. Pinal had opted to take Sittal under her wing, giving her advice and also helping her financially. The two of them would regularly sit on the couch together, browsing through postal-order magazines. Whenever they found something for the baby that was on the way, Pinal would order it for Sittal. In turn, Sittal volunteered to help Pinal in every way she could: she would prepare extra food for her, do her laundry, and so on. Pinal clearly enjoyed being depended upon and it also made her feel good to have someone look up to her. Though there was little change in her living conditions as such, Pinal seemed to have regained some of the status and self-confidence she had enjoyed as a well-to-do middle class girl in India.

During her first few months in London, Pinal had been diffident about speaking in English, but this too has changed now. Darshan sees this mainly as *his* achievement. Just before my visit in April 2010 he called me, and after a few minutes, gave the phone to Pinal. I could sense Pinal's discomfort because she spoke a few sentences and then quickly returned the phone to Darshan. 'What do you think, Mario uncle?' Darshan asked me proudly. 'She now speaks good English, doesn't she? Previously she didn't dare speak with you in English, but now she wants to call you every weekend!'

Now, this sounded familiar! After my return from my first visit to India twenty-five years ago, whenever I received a call from someone back there, who my wife had also met, I would thrust the phone into her hands and say, 'Please, Rienke! Just say something, they like that.' Rienke resented this coercion and reacted by being very brief on the phone. It took a while, but I learned my lesson and stopped imposing the phone calls on her. I do hope Darshan will also realise this. Pinal has shown us before that it is better not to try to force her to do something she doesn't want to.

Komal

coming of age

Komal (24) had registered as a student at a university in London in 2006. However, in the intervening four years she has not got even one credit point. 'Ever since high school I've wanted to go to the West. I come from a small village in Gujarat, and for as long as I remember I've been curious about how people live in the West. I don't know why, but it has always attracted me; on television and in films, it looked so different from India. So, after my Bachelor's in Applied Computer Sciences in Gujarat, I applied to various universities in America and England. In fact, I wanted to go to America, but it turned out to be easier to get a student visa for England. That's how I landed up here,' she said.

Initially, Komal was shocked and disappointed to find London rather different from what she had imagined. After arriving at Heathrow airport, she went directly to a guesthouse in East London, which she had found through friends in India. She had expected that London would be full of big, wide roads and large shopping malls teeming with white people. But what she found were only narrow streets with lots of small Asian shops. 'I thought the pilot had taken a wrong turn,' she told smilingly. 'It looked as if he had dropped me at Mangal Bazaar in Baroda [a market for clothing in one of the middle-large cities of Gujarat]. I hardly met a white person in the neighbourhood, and most people were from India and Pakistan. In fact, the first few days after I arrived, I didn't feel I was in London at all.'

However, Komal soon realised the advantages of this Indian presence in East London. She could shop for special spices and other Indian ingredients and food items without much difficulty, and equally importantly, she could quickly find a part-time job in a catering company owned by a Gujarati family.

In her home village, Komal's household is part of a group of wealthy farming families. Her father had given her money to cover her university fees during the first year and to meet her living needs for a few months. It was understood that, subsequently, Komal had to take care of her own expenses.

From her job in the catering company Komal earned some money, working in the weekend-evenings as a waitress at weddings and other parties. These celebrations were organised by the Indian community which had settled down in England since many years; some of the families had been living outside India since several generations. At one such party, Komal met a woman who had been born in East Africa and had been living in London since the early 1970s. This woman, who traced her lineage to Komal's own village, Navli, in Gujarat, invited the young girl to stay in her house paying 45 pounds a week. 'I immediately took her offer. The rent she asked was ten pounds less than what I was paying, and food was included. I also thought it'd be good to live with someone from my own village; it's always safer and it provides some support in a new city like London,' Komal said.

However, once again, things turned out differently from what Komal had imagined and she began to regret her decision. The woman had asked Komal to stay with her, calculating that it would be useful to have an extra hand to help in running her house as she had five more tenants. Even after a long day at work, Komal was expected to help in the kitchen and with miscellaneous household chores: 'I was exploited by her. I had to wash the dishes for all those people, hang their laundry to dry, and also make *chapatis* every day for all of them. I'd always thought that Indians would help each other, especially when they meet abroad, and are from the same region. But after coming to London I've noticed that Indians with a British passport look down upon people like me who have just arrived from India and hold an Indian passport. They take advantage of our situation, and of our ignorance of the way things are done here.'

Describing how miserable she felt during that difficult period, Komal said, 'In Navli we live in a joint family with eleven people: my parents, my brother and sister, my grandparents, and my uncle and aunt with their children. I missed all of them a lot and I often lay in bed at night, crying.' However, things began to look up when Komal moved out after a few months to a paying guest accommodation which she shared with ten other youngsters from Gujarat. 'I felt as if I was in a joint family once again. It was wonderful! We all shared everything and helped each other.'

Sometime later, Komal flew to Gujarat for a few weeks to get married to her school friend Vishal, who joined her in London soon afterwards. By then Komal had completely given up the idea of pursuing her studies. But, to remain eligible for a visa, she had to remain registered at a university. She selected a new college with an even lower fee. She has never seen the inside of the university she has registered with; rather, she spends all her days working. She has found a job with a homecare agency and works part time, but due to the irregular work hours she is often busy seven days a week.

Despite all the problems she has been facing Komal enjoys being in London, particularly the freedom she has to do what she wants. She loves to go out, to shop, to go to movies, or to eat out at a restaurant. It is especially during these outings to the city centre that she feels she is in England: 'Vishal and I walk there among all those white people and tell each other jokingly: see, we're really in London!'

More than once, Komal has mentioned that she wants to return to India after some time. Yet, she realises that this will entail having to give up some of her freedom, and wonders if she has already changed too much to be able to go back to a cloistered life. 'In Gujarat, I can't just go out on my own and buy something. I would always have to take someone with me. I'll have to spend most of my days in the kitchen with Vishal's mother, and I don't know if I'd be able to do that.'

'I have changed a lot since I came to London. I travel by myself in public transport, something that I never did in India; I've gained new experiences and become more independent. When I began working for the homecare agency, I didn't dare touch meat. When I had to make a ham sandwich for a

client I'd do it only after putting on plastic gloves. But now I'm used to it,' she said with a smile as I watched her preparing dinner in her kitchen. 'I really enjoy these new experiences. I want to go back to India, but I'm not sure if that'll happen any time soon.'

Komal has not acquired a single credit point in the university in all her years on a student visa in London, but she has certainly learned a lot, nevertheless.

Sohang

going back

Sohang (24) had reached London in August 2007. One-and-a-half years later, he decided to return to his home village in India though his visa was valid for another six months. 'London has been a bad experience for me, though I also learned a lot,' he told us.

In India, Sohang had been a small share broker. He had paid an agent 3,000 pounds to procure his visa and plane ticket. For the first few weeks after arriving in London, Sohang had to live off his savings from India as he could not find any job. Then he worked on several temporary jobs before settling down as a handyman in a nursing home.

'On my first day at work, I was told to clean the garden and plant flower bulbs. Only people of other castes undertake these tasks in my village in India; I'd never had to do this kind of work before. I felt extremely dejected and went to the bathroom to cry. A few days later I was told to paint the walls of a room. In India we hire six people when we want to paint our house. I began to have serious self-doubts and started asking myself: Is this why I came all the way to England?; What am I doing here?'

After some time, Sohang was transferred to the dining hall where his job was to set the tables, help the residents to eat, and clean the tables and floor afterwards. Even as he gradually grew less resentful of the work, he began to face discrimination in the nursing home. One day an elderly white resident who was waiting to be fed by Sohang yelled, 'You Asians are not doing your

work properly; why did you come to England?' An agitated Sohang replied, 'Do you see any white people around this place? There are only Asians and Africans working here. In the past year, I don't think anyone has come to visit you, but we're always available to talk to you. If not for us, nobody would take care of you.'

Although the resident lodged a complaint against Sohang, the management took a lenient view. In private Sohang's manager told him that he empathised with him, but advised him to restrain himself in the future.

Not only was Sohang dissatisfied with the kind of work he was doing, but he was also disappointed with the amount of money he was earning, for that had been his primary reason for coming to London. 'In India I earned 25,000 rupees (325 pounds) per month with my share business but I had no expenses because I was living at home. In London I could save only 30,000 rupees (390 pounds) a month after I paid for my living expenses. During the last few months I've often asked myself: did I come all the way to London to do this kind of work and to be yelled at and that too for only 5,000 rupees (65 pounds) extra per month? I decided it wasn't worth it and made up my mind to go back to India. And I'm very happy with this decision,' he told us.

Despite all the problems, however, Sohang indicated that there were occasions when he had liked London too. Together with eleven other youngsters from his home region in India, he lived in a house where they had lots of fun in the evenings and during the weekends. Sometimes they went to a park or to a theme park on the coast of England, on other days they celebrated one of their birthdays or a Hindu festival.

Moreover, Sohang learned how to do things for himself: 'A valuable experience that I'll take back with me from London,' he described it, clarifying, 'back home in India I'm the only son and I don't have to do anything. I'd just sit down when food is ready, and my mother would serve me and also wash my plate afterwards. If I want tea, I just have to ask my mother and she'd do it for me. So, when I landed in London I didn't know to make tea or wash dishes, do the laundry or iron my clothes. In Gujarat, our servant would do the laundry; afterwards, I'd take my clothes to the *istriwala* [one who irons clothes] who would deliver the ironed clothes a day later.

Here, in London, I had to learn how to do all this by myself. I learned to make tea, to do the laundry, to iron, and to even cook food in an emergency. I now know that I can take care of myself if needed, and I'm proud of that.'

Sohang also told us that he was impressed by the fact that people in London are treated as equals. 'Here, they don't discriminate on the basis of a person's occupation. In India we look down on those who are barbers, cleaners, and so on. For instance, in our house in India, when we give food or water to a barber, we wouldn't serve him on a plate or glass used by the family. The vessels to be used by him are segregated, and they're also washed separately and put away separately. Also, if the barber invites us for a function at his home, we'll attend the event, and give him a gift, but skip the dinner. As the host, he'll ask us to stay for dinner. But both of us know that this is just a formality. We'll tell him that we came after having our dinner. The barber, though he knows this isn't true, will not insist we eat at his place. Such are our customs!'

'But when I go back to India, I'll eat at the barber's place when he invites us to his house. In London I learned that every job is worthy in its own way, because if no one performs these tasks you have to do them yourself. If the barber doesn't cut our hair, if the servant doesn't clean our floors, we would have to do all their jobs ourselves. Cleaning, serving...all these are important and here in London they don't look down upon those who do this kind of work. I'm now much more aware of this because that's the kind of work I had to do here. I've changed as a person because of this experience and it's a message I'll take with me when I return to India.'

Sohang

changing plans

‘I’ve been back in India for three weeks now, but I want to go back to London again as soon as possible,’ Sohang told us when we went to meet him in his home village in December 2008. In November that year, when we met him in London, he had shown us his ticket to India, declaring proudly, ‘I bought a one-way ticket because I do not want to come back. I’ve had enough of the kind of work I have to do here and I miss the social life in India. I miss my family and my friends. I ran a small share broker business with my friends in Gujarat and we always used to be together – at work, in the evenings after work, and in the weekends.’

What could have happened in just three weeks that had made Sohang change his mind? Why did he suddenly want to return to London?

In their village, Sohang’s family would be categorised as ‘middle class’. His father works as an accountant in a local tobacco company, his mother is a housewife, and his sister is studying in a college. The family occupies the ground floor of a large house that was built by Sohang’s grandfather. Their biggest asset is a sizeable piece of agricultural land that abuts a new highway. The value of this land has risen in recent times and real estate developers have evinced great interest in it.

When he had first left for London, Sohang had planned to earn enough money to build a new house for his family, with all modern luxuries and facilities, including contemporary furniture. He had hoped that the money he

saved in London, along with the sale of their land, would be enough to pay for this dream house, the marriage expenses of his sister and himself, and, hopefully, for a car as well. But, in the end, it all turned out differently.

Sohang could not find a well-paid job in London, and due to the high cost of living, he was not able to save as much as he had hoped to either. Living frugally, he was able to return to India with about 500,000 rupees (7,000 pounds). This was less than what he had hoped for, but Sohang thought that it would be adequate for his plans if they could manage to sell off their land, and he could get back into the share broker business and earn as before. However, because of his eagerness to return to India, Sohang had failed to provide for the possibility of the worldwide credit crisis having an impact on his home village too.

‘Of course, I heard about the credit crunch when I was in London, but it didn’t affect me personally,’ he told us. ‘I wasn’t earning much, but I would get a fixed salary every month. I was so excited about returning home after one-and-half years that I thought I could just pick up where I had left off before going to London, without realising that the share market had collapsed. In the past three weeks I have understood this, and also how difficult it has become for us to sell off our piece of land. A few months back, developers were willing to pay a lot of money for it, but due to the credit crisis they’re no longer eager to buy our land. They tell us that it’s risky to build houses now as they may not be able to sell them. That’s why I must go back to London. I’m not looking forward to it, but I have no choice.’

Sohang’s parents told us that they felt sad about having to be separated from their son once again, though they seemed to have little idea of the hard life that awaited him in London. ‘Whenever I called my parents, I always told them I was doing fine and that I was enjoying my stay in London. I didn’t want them to worry, so I avoided telling them about the real situation. My mother always asked me whether I was eating well, and I always replied that I had just had dinner, though I might not have had a proper meal the whole day.’

With his younger sister, however, Sohang was more candid. He told her about the problems he faced in London, particularly as she herself was very eager to

find a job in England after her studies. 'She thinks life over there is wonderful and that you can earn a lot of money. I know better now and I tell her that England is not as beautiful as we imagine, that people like us get only low-skilled jobs and low wages, and that we have to live with ten or twelve people in a small house. But she doesn't want to hear such things; like all youngsters in India she thinks that England is paradise.'

A week after we met Sohang in his village, we went back to see him to say goodbye before returning to Holland. To our great surprise, he told us that he had changed his plans again. A much-relieved Sohang told us that a buyer had evinced interest in their land. Since that meant money for his plans would now become available, he could stay back in India: 'I can build a new house, pay for my sister's wedding and mine, buy a car and anything else that I want to. I'm so happy I don't have to go back to London.' When we told him that we were amazed to find him changing his mind so often, every time we met in fact, he replied, 'I change my mind not just every week, but every day, sometimes even every hour!'

Four weeks later, we came to know that he had indeed changed his plans, yet again. I was back in Holland, and had been trying to contact Sohang via email and telephone, but without success. Just as I was beginning to wonder what had happened, one of his friends told me that he was back in London. When I called Sohang subsequently, he explained that he had to come back to London to earn money as the deal with the land-buyer had not materialised. At that time Sohang's visa was valid for six more months. In March 2009 we met him again in London and in July that year he returned to India, just before his visa expired.

Dhruti

fulfilling dreams

Dhruti (25) came to London in 2006 in pursuit of a simple dream: to be with her boyfriend, Jignesh. ‘If I had stayed in India, my parents would have forced me to marry someone else. So, I told them that I wanted to go to England for further studies, but I really just wanted to be with Jignesh.’

In India, Dhruti did a bachelor’s degree in Microbiology in a small town that was about fifty minutes by train from her home town, Baroda. Every day she would travel to and from her college, along with other students from Baroda. One such co-student was Jignesh, who was doing a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. ‘I liked him from the moment I saw him, but I couldn’t tell my parents because “love marriages” are still not common in India. Most marriages are arranged by the family and they take place within the same caste. Jignesh and I belong to different castes and that was the problem, especially because my father highly values traditions. I knew for sure that he wouldn’t approve of our relationship.’

After he got a bachelor’s degree, Jignesh enrolled as a student in a master’s programme in Business Administration in London. ‘His father supported his idea of studying in London, but Jignesh’s main goal was to impress *my* father,’ explained Dhruti, adding, ‘People in India admire everything that comes from the West. Parents like to have a son-in-law who has studied abroad. Jignesh thought that by getting a degree from a university in London and by getting a good job there, he could convince my father to give us permission to get married.’

Just before Jignesh left for England, he proposed to Dhruvi. Recalling the incident, Dhruvi said, 'He was afraid of asking me to my face, so he called me up from the airport just as he was about to board the plane. "Do you want to marry me?" he asked, and then said, "Wait for me; I'll be back in one-and-a-half years." I didn't give him an answer immediately, but told him that he should concentrate on his studies, and that I'd call him back. Two days later I called him up in London and told him: "Yes, I do want to marry you." Not long after that I decided to apply for a student visa to England because I wanted to be with him.'

During her first months in London, Dhruvi tried to attend classes and to keep up with the homework. She had also hoped to find part-time work that would be in line with her educational background. This turned out to be impossible. 'I would have very much liked to do a master's in Microbiology in London, but we needed money for rent and other expenses, and we also had to pay for Jignesh's studies. Since this meant I had to work, there was no time left for my studies. In the beginning I tried to get a job in a laboratory or to become a nurse-in-training in a hospital, but that wasn't possible because I'm on a temporary student visa. I quickly realised that I had to take up some low-skilled job.'

Dhruvi worked for the first two years in a McDonald's outlet, after which she got a job in a Starbucks coffee shop. Although Dhruvi clearly enjoys her work, she still hopes to resume her studies in the future.

More than once Dhruvi told us that she had enjoyed being a student in India. She recalled her college days with nostalgia, and told us she had liked studying Microbiology. With great enthusiasm she showed us a picture of herself and her co-students in India during a practical class in the laboratory. Some of her co-students had gone on to do a master's degree, while others had found jobs in the laboratory of a pharmaceutical company. 'Whenever I call them, they tell me how lucky I am to be in London. But I tell them that they're the lucky ones, because they've got to work in a laboratory. For me, getting such a job is just a dream as of now.'

Besides feeling somewhat despondent that her studies had been suspended, Dhruvi was also unhappy that she had to constantly lie to her parents about it:

‘Every week I call home to find out how they are, and my parents often ask how my studies are going and how I’ve done my exams. I find it terrible to lie to them, and I always end up crying after I put down the phone.’ She was also not able to confess to her parents about her relationship with Jignesh though she was very happy to be with him.

We were struck by the poignancy of the situation when we met her parents in Gujarat for our documentary *Living Like a Common Man* (2011). ‘In London they have the best universities in the world. Dhruvi also works there in a Starbucks company, but that’s not the most important thing. She didn’t go there to work; she went to London to study and we’re very proud of her,’ said Dhruvi’s father.

In 2008 Dhruvi and Jignesh seriously considered getting married in London, but they decided against it because they knew it would make their parents terribly unhappy to learn that their offspring had married without their consent. They made up their minds, instead, to go to India and persuade their parents to permit them to marry. Before going to India, they made several long-distance calls to Dhruvi’s elder sister and Jignesh’s elder brother, and sought their help. The siblings and their spouses met in a restaurant subsequently, and after much planning, broke the news to their respective parents through carefully selected mediators. Dhruvi’s father firmly opposed the alliance initially. His wife and Dhruvi’s elder sister pressurised him to consent and persuaded him to meet Jignesh’s family, after which he relented.

Dhruvi was thrilled on learning about her father’s permission, particularly since she did not have to keep her relationship under wraps any more. But she has yet to find the courage to tell her father that she has discontinued her studies.

During a brief visit to India, Dhruvi and Jignesh had a civil marriage, followed by a small ceremony at Jignesh’s house. They plan to have a more elaborate marriage ceremony in India at a later date.

Dhruvi’s temporary migration to England has made it possible for her to marry Jignesh with her parents’ permission, something which may not have been possible had she stayed back in India. Her dream to be with Jignesh has

come true. Let us hope that she will also be able to fulfil her ambition of continuing her studies and finding a job that complements her educational background.

Jignesh

future plans

Jignesh (25) is generally reserved, and seldom initiates a conversation in a group. But when you meet him for a tête-à-tête, he is happy to talk about his future plans. When he arrived in London in 2006, it was with a clear goal: 'To complete my higher studies, to get work experience, and to earn money, so that my prospects would improve when I return to India.' Events did not unfold in such a streamlined manner as he had hoped for, but Jignesh is not the kind of person who is dissuaded by drawbacks.

After a few weeks in London, Jignesh realised that study and work could not follow each other in linear succession. He began delivering newspapers, after which he got a job in a petrol station and, later, a pizza delivery service. 'Over here, even people with a master's degree in Business Administration have to do low skilled work,' he observed. But his family and friends in India were shocked when he told them about his side jobs. 'In India, only boys from poor families and from lower castes work as newspaper delivery boys and petrol pump helpers. My girl-friend Dhruiti and my parents couldn't believe their ears when I told them.'

By 2008, when I first met him, Jignesh had managed to complete his master's degree. In fact, he was the only one to have done so among the twelve young people in the house. 'Most of them here have come to London on a student visa, but in this house nobody really studies, everyone works,' he said, rightly proud of his own achievement.

In India, Jignesh had completed a bachelor's degree in Business Administration at a local university, before enrolling for a master's programme in the same subject at a university in London. His parents took a loan to pay for part of his education. 'Since many years Jignesh has wanted to go to the West to study,' his parents told me when I went to meet them in Gujarat. 'He enjoys being in London and he has also changed for the better after going there. In Gujarat he hardly used to study, but in London he studies very hard though he also has a job, simultaneously. Besides, he speaks much better English now. He even began writing letters to us in English, but we told him to stop doing that. Of course, there are other changes too...he has taken to wearing his hair long, like the other youngsters in Europe.'

After graduation, Jignesh secured a Post-Study Work visa, on the basis of which he could stay on in England for one more year. In this period he planned to get work experience, earn enough to pay off his debts, and also to save money so that he could return to India with a comfortable cushion. Soon, he got a job in the warehouse of an auto parts company, where he had to keep track of the inventory by entering data into the computer. Although this work was not in line with his educational background, Jignesh still decided to put in an application for a long-term High Skilled Migration Permit. But as his annual income was too low, his request was turned down, and he and Dhruvi, who had joined him in England in late 2006, lost 800 pounds on visa costs and the agent's fees. More importantly, they seemed to have lost their chances of staying on longer in England, with its attendant benefits.

As Jignesh explained every time we met him in London, he and Dhruvi had come to England with the aim of building a better future for themselves in India, but that was not possible unless he could get work experience in a good company in London, and earn money to pay off his study loan. 'Most youngsters here in this house belong to families who have their own company or who own agricultural land. When they go back to India, they'll join their family business; they don't have to worry about their future. That's not the situation I'm in. My father has an administrative job in a private company, and we have no property in India except for the house we live in. If I go back without work experience and without savings, I have to start from scratch. I need to work here in order to safeguard my future in India.'

A few months after his application for a High Skilled Migration Permit was rejected, Jignesh re-submitted it. This time it was approved because their agent had found a way to artificially hike Jignesh's annual income. This made it possible for him, and Dhruvi, to stay in London for a minimum of two more years. Shortly after this happy occurrence, Jignesh and Dhruvi left the paying guest accommodation they had lived in ever since their arrival in London and moved into a rented house with two other couples. This made them feel more like settled migrants than temporary migrants and they regarded the event as a milestone in their life abroad. Their self-assurance got a further boost when Jignesh was promoted from a job in the warehouse department to an administrative position in the sales department at the head office. Though the promotion did not result in a real raise in salary, Jignesh sees it as a step towards getting a better position in London.

After being abroad for four years, Jignesh has advanced in some ways towards realising his ambitions: He has got a master's degree from a London university, and a visa that allows him and Dhruvi to stay longer in England. But he has not yet been able to do much with his degree and it has also turned out to be more difficult to save money than he had anticipated. So, has Jignesh's decision to go to London increased his chances of a better future in India? It is difficult to answer this with certainty at the moment. Only time will tell.

Haresh

going east

‘This is Haresh, my brother-in-law from London,’ Gopal said when I joined him for dinner in the Singapore Cricket Club one evening in 2007. Together with six other family members, Gopal had organised a dinner for Haresh and his wife, both of whom had arrived the previous day. Dinner in the cricket club had become the traditional start of their annual holiday in Singapore.

‘It’s great to be back in Singapore,’ Haresh said when I sat down next to him. ‘It’s safe here; the Singapore government is very strict when you do not obey the law. There is no corruption and there is no welfare state that makes people lazy. Singapore has the future, if you want to make progress in life you have to move to Singapore. In England I pay heavy taxes, but what do I get back for that? England has become more and more like a third world country. There is a lot of theft, violence and even corruption. I have lived in England most of my life, but I feel less and less at home there.’

Haresh was ten years old when his father brought him, his mother and his two sisters to London. Born in 1932, Haresh’s father had migrated to Singapore in 1954. His move from India to Singapore was planned as part of marriage negotiations with the family of Haresh’s mother. Three generations of her family had lived in Singapore already.

With high expectations, Haresh’s father had arrived in Singapore. Although he had completed secondary school, he did not see a future for himself in India. He hoped to have better chances of finding suitable work in Singapore. After

taking up several low-skilled jobs, he realised that he would also not be able to find work in accordance with his education even in Singapore.

‘In those days, there was a lot of corruption in Singapore. To get a good job, you needed money or contacts and your mother’s family had neither,’ Haresh’s father told him on several occasions. Moreover, Singapore’s stability was threatened by severe social and political problems. With the separation of Singapore from the Malaysian Federation in the early 1960s, large-scale violence and unrest erupted. The political and economic future of the newly established state of Singapore was highly uncertain.

In 1967, the opportunity to migrate to England presented itself to Haresh’s father through a family member from India. He did not hesitate even for a moment and jumped at the chance to have a better future for himself and his family. ‘In those days, England was still seen as a rich and powerful nation where one could get work on the basis of one’s capacities and not on the basis of personal contacts, my father used to say.’

After some time, Haresh’s father found a government job and was able to bring his family over from Singapore in 1970. In England, Haresh completed his secondary school and went on to do a diploma course in engineering. He quickly found work with the ground staff of British Airways at Heathrow airport, where he still works as a supervisor.

After his graduation, Haresh married his present wife, who belonged to an Indian family in Singapore. In those days, there was a great demand for young men (potential sons-in-law) of Indian origin with a British passport among Indian families in Singapore. Following the economic rise of Singapore in the years thereafter, all that changed quickly, Haresh narrated. ‘We used to regularly visit my family-in-law and my mother’s family in Singapore and saw the changes over time. Singapore developed into one of the fastest growing economies in the world.’

While Haresh’s father continued to see Singapore as a developing country to which he never intended to return, his son Haresh became more and more convinced that his children might have a better future in Asia than in England. Partly because of that, Haresh’s wife never gave up her Singaporean

nationality. 'In that way we would always have the option to settle here,' he remarked.

'Singapore is one of the safest and most developed countries in the world. Everything here is organised excellently,' Haresh emphasised at the end of the evening. 'Gopal (his brother-in-law) has got everything here. He has a successful company and has even become a member of the Singapore Cricket Club, a highly prestigious club that has existed for more than 150 years and only has about 3,000 members. My father did not see any future in India and he was also not able to make much progress in Singapore.'

'It is funny to say, but I have the feeling that everything has turned upside down during my lifetime. For a long time, those of us living in England were seen as the success story in our family. When I was young, our relatives in Singapore looked up to us. My nephews and nieces [in Singapore] were jealous of me and wanted to migrate to England.'

'Today, it is just the other way around. In London, there is a lot of unemployment, violence and corruption – exactly the same things my father ran away from in Asia. In Europe, there are few opportunities for the younger generation, while Singapore's economy continues to grow and grow. My son graduated four years ago, but he can't find a suitable job in England. He often talks about the success of my brother-in-law and his two sons and he seriously considers moving to Singapore. I think he is right. If I were a young man I would not hesitate for a moment to move to Asia. Even India is on the rise. Europe is finished; there they live in the past. Asia has the future!'

Maruthani

crossing borders

During my three-month fellowship at the National University of Singapore in 2006, Maruthani (35) and I were often the first to enter the building at eight o'clock in the morning. Maruthani arrives around that time after a long bus ride from her place of residence in the south of Malaysia. Six days a week she wakes up at 4.30 a.m. Before she leaves for work, she prepares breakfast for her three children, and then walks for twenty minutes to the bus stop. After a two-hour bus ride, including a stop at the border of Singapore, she arrives at the university at 8 a.m. At the end of the day she makes the same long journey once again – this time in the reverse direction – and arrives home around 7 p.m. She then cooks dinner for her children, cleans the house and goes to bed immediately so she can again get up early the next day.

It has been one year now that Maruthani has been working as a cleaning lady at the National University of Singapore, employed through a contract-based cleaning company in Malaysia. During my stay, we sometimes chatted briefly in the corridor or in the kitchen. On those occasions, Maruthani would always look around skittishly to make sure that the supervisor of her cleaning company would not catch her talking. I slowly came to know a little more about the history of her family and the expectations she has for her children.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Maruthani's grandparents had migrated from the southern part of British India to work as plantation labourers in British Malaya. A few years ago she divorced her husband after a lot of suffering, and has not seen him since. Her most important goal in life

has been to have her three children complete their secondary school. She opted for a job as a cleaner in Singapore because she could not find work in her home town. During the daytime, her eldest son, who is fifteen, takes care of his two younger sisters, while the neighbours keep an eye on them. The long journey each day adds to Maruthani's workload, but there is nothing she can do about it. Even then she only earns € 300 per month, considerably lesser than what she would have earned if she had been employed through a cleaning company from Singapore.

Maruthani is one of the many foreign workers in Singapore. In 2006, more than 30 per cent of the working population of Singapore's 4.5 million inhabitants were foreigners. The international dimension of Singapore's society is clearly visible in its daily life. On the streets, in public transport, in shops, in businesses and institutions, and in neighbourhoods you constantly come across foreigners who have lived in Singapore only for a short or long period of time. There are Europeans, Americans, and Australians, but also people from other parts of Asia, such as Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

During lunch in the university canteen a Vietnamese colleague once expressed his admiration for this international dimension of Singapore. 'Singapore is *the* example of development and globalisation,' he remarked. 'It is very luxurious, clean and safe here. There is not much inequality and there is no social unrest. Nobody is poor; everyone lives in nice apartments, often with all kinds of sporting facilities and sometimes even with a swimming pool. The country looks just like one big five-star hotel: the air-conditioning is always switched on and there are constantly people from all over the world who check in for a few months or for a few years, and after some time they check out again to return to their own country.'

A few days later, Maruthani entered my room. She had had a bad experience that morning and was still visibly upset about it. While cleaning up on another floor of the building, she had overheard a conversation between two Singaporean women – one of Chinese, the other of Malay descent. A few days earlier she had asked the women something in Bahasa Malayu. The women had replied in English. 'They know that I don't speak English. They only do it to show me that Indians are lower than they are,' Maruthani said. 'This

morning I overheard them talking to each other in Bahasa Malayu about Kuyila (one of the other cleaning ladies from Malaysia). They said to each other that it was ridiculous that Kuyila was wearing make-up. One of them said that it's of no use for Indian women to wear make-up because you can't see it on their dark skin. They both laughed,' Maruthani ended with anger in her voice.

Maruthani's story reminded me about my Vietnamese colleague's comparison of Singapore with a five-star hotel from a few days ago. I began to realise that the metaphor used might not be totally wrong, although in a different way than intended by my colleague, who had a one-sided view of Singapore. Singapore could indeed be seen as one big five-star hotel, but you then also have to bring into the equation the cleaners, the domestic servants, the construction workers, and other low and unskilled workers. They make up almost 90 per cent of the total number of foreign workers in Singapore, but are much less visible in the five-star hotel society of Singapore than its more wealthy guests. Cleaners like Maruthani enter Singapore via the service entrance and leave again via the rear door. They make long hours for low pay and work on temporary contracts, without any claims on social benefits. The majority of those at the bottom of Singapore's society mostly belong to specific ethnic communities and are confronted with various forms and layers of discrimination. Several colleagues at the university told me that the government does not encourage research into this side of the five-star hotel. That might explain the absence of a department of Anthropology in Singapore.

Sheela

on the move

Twenty-five years ago Sheela (51) graduated in anthropology from the University of Amsterdam. I met her and her family in the village of Zijderveld in October 2010 at the Diwali celebration (Hindu festival) of the Ugandan Hindus Association in the Netherlands. The association consists of migrants of Indian origin, who came as refugees from Uganda to the Netherlands in 1972. There were 60 families at the time, of which about 30 still live in the Netherlands. Most of them originate from the Indian state of Gujarat. As part of the earlier Dutch policy of spatial distribution of incoming migrants, the families ended up living in different parts of the Netherlands. Centrally located as Zijderveld is in the Netherlands, it is therefore suitable for the annual celebration of the Diwali Festival of the Ugandan Hindu Association in the Netherlands.

In 1958, Sheela's father had moved from Gujarat to Uganda to join his elder brother and his family in Jinja. After a few years, he married Sheela's mother who was born in Uganda in a Gujarati family that had migrated from India in the 1930s. Sheela's father worked as an electrical engineer in a sugarcane factory in Lugazi, in the interior of Uganda, where he lived with his wife and four children until 1972.

'We used to live in a bungalow in an Indian neighbourhood. I still remember how beautiful it was there,' Sheela said. 'All that changed after Idi Amin came to power through a military coup. Uganda had become independent in 1962 and he was of the opinion that the Asian population had too much economic

power in the country and was the cause of poverty among the African people. Over time, the mood turned grim and more violent. On August 4, 1972, Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of all Asians from Uganda, giving them 90 days to leave the country. My mother was born in British Uganda and therefore held a British passport. My father decided to send my mother and the four of us [children] to England. We ended up in London with one of his relatives. We stayed with them for three months, with the five of us occupying their living room. I still remember what I thought at that time: Will this be our future? Is this the beautiful London about which we always learned at school?

Sheela's father had stayed back in Uganda, but the situation quickly worsened. He had a Ugandan passport and could therefore not go to England. He was sent to a refugee camp of the United Nations in Austria. There he became part of a group of Indian refugees from Uganda who were taken in by the Dutch Government. In November 1972, the first group arrived in the Netherlands.

'In the beginning, my father had doubts whether he should bring us to the Netherlands or if he should try to join us in England. During his stay in Austria he phoned us a few times in London.. He then also talked with the son of his elder brother, who had been living in England for several years already. He [My cousin] advised my father to take us with him to the Netherlands. The mood in England was hostile to migrants at the time as a result of the stream of Asian refugees from Uganda and other parts of Africa [that was flowing in]. The right wing party National Front had gained strength and there were several incidences of racism in the country. My father then decided that it was better for us as a family to settle down in the Netherlands and so we did.'

While staying in the refugee camp in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands, the Gujarati families had asked the Dutch government to relocate all of them together. Their request, however, was denied and they were relocated to different parts of the Netherlands. Sheela's family ended up in Spijkenisse, a small town near Rotterdam. Her father found a job as an electrician in an oil refinery. A major part of his work was outdoors. During the first winter he got pneumonia and had to opt for sick leave. With the help of a Gujarati friend from the refugee camp in Apeldoorn, he then managed to get a job in a factory of Philips in the eastern town of Almelo, which is where the family moved next.

‘When I arrived in the Netherlands, I felt I had lost the ground beneath my feet,’ Sheela said. ‘I did not know anyone and had to start to learn a whole new language. Through hard work I managed to complete high school with good marks, and went on to study anthropology. I married a man whose family had migrated from Suriname but originally came from India as indentured labourers. Our two children have integrated well in Dutch society and are both studying at the university.’

The end of 2012 marked 40 years since the 60 Gujarati families arrived in the Netherlands. To ensure that their history is not forgotten, Sheela took up the initiative of writing a book based on interviews with different generations within these families.

‘Now that I am busy with that, I notice that I often have mixed feelings about our history. If my father had not chosen the Netherlands but England, my life would have looked very different. Everything in life sometimes depends on such decisions. The Dutch helped us enormously when we arrived here and we are thankful for that, but in the end I never really felt that I was accepted as one of them. Even now when I give trainings, there is someone or the other coming up to me afterwards to compliment me on my Dutch. That would never happen in England. The Dutch do not easily accept and include people from other countries; it does not happen naturally. Somehow you always remain an outsider. I can see the difference between me and my sister who migrated to England after her marriage. In the cities of England there are many people from different parts of the world, as a result of which you never feel like a stranger. They are more used to assessing people by their capacities and not on the basis of their place of origin.’

The interviews for her book made Sheela realise how much the expulsion of her family from Uganda had impacted her. ‘In the upbringing of my children I have always emphasised that they should get a good education. You can have a good job and a beautiful house, but when something happens you cannot take those with you. What you take with you is your education; nobody can take that away from you. I have always taught my children that the world should be their home. We travel to different parts of the world regularly and try to make sure that they can feel at home everywhere. They should feel that they can live

and make use of opportunities anywhere, because you never know when you have to relocate to a new country and start all over again.’

Dixit

desire for independence

‘During the first weeks after I returned from England, I was annoyed by everything and everyone in India,’ Dixit (29) remarked during my two-day stay with him and his parents at the beginning of 2014. ‘I just couldn’t get used to the fact that no one here follows the rules. After I got back, I was in the car with my father and I could not stop cursing at the other motorists those first few days. My father said: “If you continue to wind yourself up like this, you’re going to develop heart problems. People in India will never change, not in 100 years!” But I was angry. To me, the people in India were rude. I could not get accustomed to no one ever saying “thank you” or “sorry”, which is normal in England. And most of all I hated how the only way you can get anything done here in India is through corruption.’

I have known Dixit about six years, and his uncles since 1986, when I interviewed them in their village for my PhD research. Twenty years ago Dixit’s father moved with his family to the nearby city of Anand. During my visits to India, I live with my friend on his factory grounds in Dixit’s village, where I had a room built for me in a warehouse. Whenever I am in India, Dixit and his parents invite me to stay with them. They do not understand why I live in the factory in the village when they have several unoccupied rooms – with bathrooms – in their house. After much insistence, I accepted their offer this time.

Dixit is from a medium-sized farming family that grew prosperous through agriculture and trade. Dixit’s father made a lot of money in recent years from

the purchase and sale of agricultural land in particular. He has proudly taken me on several occasions to see a real estate project in which they received several bungalows worth €100,000 each in exchange for their land. The community pool, bar, gym and restaurant are always the highlight of our visits.

Dixit had wanted to go to England ever since he was a child. When we visited his family in 2008 for our documentary *Living Like a Common Man* (2011), his father told us: 'I have only one son. When I tell him to stay in India and I forbid him to go to London, he is very disappointed and very angry. My son wants to go to London or America anyhow!'

In 2009 Dixit managed to go to London on a student visa. He did not study; he found simple and low-paying work, and lived in a small house with eleven other young people. He had to return to India in September 2011 because his visa expired.

Now that he is back in India, Dixit says that he learned a lot in England. His parents confirm this every time I meet them. When I asked his mother once whether Dixit's sojourn in England had changed him, she said: 'Dixit has become more independent and he speaks much better English. He has more self-confidence, he is more disciplined, more organised in his life. He knows what he wants and no longer stays in bed all morning.' His father likewise mentioned that Dixit used money he earned in London to have the family house painted. Considering his parent's wealth it was not necessary for Dixit to pay for the job, but he really wanted to, and his father now talks about it with pride.

Three years after his return, however, Dixit still has difficulty living in India. Aside from the fact that no one obeys the rules, he struggles most with being dependent on his parents again. He simply cannot get used to having to ask his father for money every time he wants to buy something for himself.

Dixit's father does not understand his son's problem: 'When I was young my brothers and I shared everything with my parents and all we could think about was how we could pass on our capital to the next generation. The youth of today have a very different mindset. They really want to create something new

and show that they can do it themselves. It wasn't like that in the old days.' That last part is not entirely true. Dixit's father conveniently forgets that his brother – Dixit's uncle – left for East Africa 45 years ago, not because there was such a pressing economic need to do so, but more because he wanted to establish something himself and no longer be dependent on his older brothers.

Dixit's decision to move to England was not motivated by economic reasons; it was largely driven by a desire for independence. Three years after returning, Dixit still says that he would like to go back to England. He has a lot of agricultural land and multiple real estate projects in India with his father. Still, he would prefer to go to London and open either a neighbourhood market or a *Subway* restaurant. 'I would like to set up my own business, something that is mine,' he stated repeatedly.

Whilst Dixit goes to England in order to be able to operate independently, I on the other hand enjoy being dependent on others in India. Anthropological research means being dependent on informants and their willingness to provide one with access or information. In a society like India's, this dependence also often means that people want to help you and do anything for you. And I must confess that I often enjoy that aspect of being dependent on others during my fieldwork in India.

There is, however, another side to that dependence on others during my fieldwork, which I again noticed during my stay with Dixit and his parents. When I was ready to go upstairs that first night and enjoy my private room and bathroom, Dixit followed me. I had assumed that he and I would be sleeping in our own separate rooms, which would have been easily arranged considering the numerous unoccupied rooms in the house. I quickly realised that the plan was for us to share a two-person bed. 'I will sleep with you, Mario Uncle; that way you won't be alone,' Dixit reassured me. I did not wish to disappoint him, and thus accepted his offer to share a bed.

Dixit wants to be independent, but not alone, and he cannot imagine that I would enjoy sleeping alone. At the same time, I'm delighted to be dependent on others in India, but I do really appreciate the opportunity to sleep alone every now and then!

Colleagues

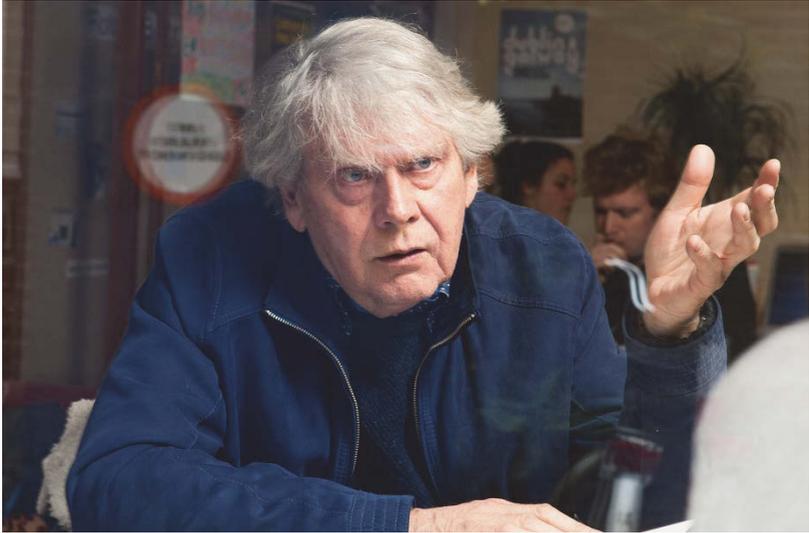




Amrapali (right) gives advice to visitors on her veranda (photo Sanderien Verstappen).



Erwan at a workshop in Davao City, Philippines (photo Rosanne Rutten).



Jojada at the University of Amsterdam (photo Ayamus).



Ambalal (far right) with relatives in his native village in Gujarat, India.

Hein

a Dutch collegial coach

It is already dark out as I ride the metro to Buitenveldert to see Hein Streefkerk. Hein spent over 30 years in our department as an anthropologist specialising in labour relations in India. He arranged to take early retirement in September 2004. Tragedy struck a month before he was due to retire: he contracted a brain infection and it destroyed his short-term memory. He has been in a care facility in Amsterdam ever since. Hein was a highly respected teacher and researcher and an outstanding colleague. Now, more than a year later, he continues to receive visits from colleagues on a regular basis.

My arrival coincides with Hein's weekly music therapy session. It allows him to pursue his hobby of drumming. I peer inside through the glass door. Hein has already seen me and winks. 'It's so nice that you're here,' he says, even though he no longer knows my name. When I say 'Mario', he responds with a smile. 'Oh right, Mario Rutten' and everything comes back.

The teacher prefaces each song they play with a long-winded explanation. 'When are we going to start drumming again? I'm getting cold,' Hein says impatiently. His memory may have been affected, but fortunately his personality remains unchanged. He is as friendly as always and sometimes a little fidgety. During meetings he might suddenly interrupt a colleague's lengthy monologue: 'That's not what we came here for; let's talk about the subject that we're here to discuss.' You would see others nodding in agreement; they lacked the courage to speak up.

I enjoy seeing him again. When I say that it's actually quite nice here, his face clouds over and he says: 'Mario, this is my life.' He is becoming increasingly aware of what is wrong with him, and that he might not get any better. 'Do you think I'll have to stay here all my life?' he often asks.

The teacher continues to do more talking than playing. Hein decides that we would be better off going to his room. We get a coffee and play a game of chess. I lose, as I do almost every time. As we play, he asks how things are at home. He was always interested in his colleagues' personal well-being. For example, he would often call me a few days beforehand if he knew I was going to Asia. Typically, I would stay up late those last few days prior to departure, desperately trying to finish up all sorts of things. Hein would speak to me sternly: 'Mario, are you still working? Impossible! It makes no sense whatsoever to try to finish everything now. You're about to go away for a long time, so stop whatever you're doing and use these days to do something nice with your wife and your children.' It was just what I needed: usually I would put down the remaining work and board my flight a couple of days later in a relaxed state of mind.

Upon learning that I had just come from the university, Hein wants to know how things are and what I had done during the day. I tell him about a discussion that I had with a student about the value of accurately rendering an author's key arguments before offering one's opinion on a text. Hein brightens: 'That's exactly what I always tried to teach them, too: carefully describe what you see and hear first, *then* start the interpretation process. That's the essence of anthropology.'

His enthusiasm is contagious and I ask him whether it might be interesting for him to try to record everything that happens in the home care facility – from an anthropologist's perspective. 'Yes, that would be interesting,' he agrees. 'What do you see here? You see two men in a room who are conversing and just played chess. One will be heading home soon; the other will spend his entire life in a 3 by 4 metre room.' Hein looks at me, tears welling in his eyes. I take his hand. To cheer us both up a bit, I show him the printer's proof of his book that is about to be published in India, and that he finished shortly before he fell ill. He is extremely surprised and proud, but he can no longer recall writing it.

'I'm really glad you came,' Hein says during our farewell. I walk outside with a lot on my mind, but a lightness in my heart. I know that I will need a day to recover, but seeing him always makes me happy. In a couple of weeks I will be travelling to Asia. For now it will be on me to force myself to stop working well before I leave.

Carol

an Indian scholar of foreign origin

Carol Upadhya (58) is professor of anthropology at the *National Institute for Advanced Studies* (NIAS) in Bangalore, India. Since early 2010, we have been working together on a research programme about the impact of Indian migrants on their home region in India. I met Carol for the first time in 1992 when we edited a book together on small businessmen in Asia and Europe. Carol is American by origin, born and raised in the Caribbean island of Aruba. As a PhD student in anthropology at Yale University, Carol went to India in the early 1980s to conduct research among capitalist farmers in Andhra Pradesh, south India. During that time, she met her future husband Sanjeev. After finishing her PhD, they married and since then Carol lives in India.

In the past 35 years, Carol has become Indian in many respects. It is often hard to distinguish her from those born and raised in the country. She is fluent in Hindi and speaks English with an Indian accent. In her use of English, she has also taken to the Indian habit of using imperatives when she wants to ask for something. 'Give me water,' she says in a restaurant, instead of 'May I have some water (please)?' She regularly shows up late for meetings and seems to think that there is nothing wrong with it.

In terms of her official status too, Carol has become an Indian. She still holds an American passport, but the Indian state sees her as someone of Indian origin. A few years ago she got a PIO card (Person of Indian Origin) and thereby occupies the same position as migrants of Indian origin with a foreign passport. I often noticed that her Indian colleagues think of Carol as a local

scholar. Like other Indian scholars she sometimes finds it difficult to accept criticism of Indian society by foreign researchers. Yet, at the same time, as a foreigner she is able to look at developments in India from a distance and finds it sometimes difficult to defend the viewpoints of her Indian colleagues.

Carol's position as a 'foreigner of Indian origin' is also visible in her day-to-day behavior. She is Indian in many ways, but continues to be surprised when people in a city like Bangalore behave in an 'Indian' manner. She drives her car like a 'real' Indian driver: she horns constantly, does not give way to others but tries to navigate her car in every possible way through the traffic. At the same time, she regularly gets upset when other drivers do not follow traffic rules and do not give her the right of way. She parks her car in places where it is not allowed, and is surprised when cars that are parked wrongly are not towed away.

Carol regularly expresses surprise that I still try to hold on to some of my Dutch habits while being in India, despite having conducted research in Gujarat for the past 30 years. At her institute, full lunch, consisting of *chapatis*, vegetables, rice and curry, is provided daily. After such a heavy lunch I do not feel like having a full dinner in the evening, so I usually restrict my meal to a sandwich with cheese or some muesli, along with some salad. Carol fails to understand why I do so. 'You can't just eat a snack in the evening, Mario, you really need a hot meal in the evening as well.' If only to make sure that I eat properly during my stay at her institute, she regularly takes me out for dinner in the evening.

During my stay at Carol's institute in 2012, we had invited a colleague from the USA to help us out with our research programme. During those days, Carol had organised dinner every evening, but due to work commitments she had not been able to make a booking on the last evening of our colleague's stay. 'I know a restaurant we can go to,' I told Carol as we walked to her car wondering where we should go for dinner. Carol first looked at me with a bit of suspicion, but accepted my offer as she could not immediately think of another place to go to.

After we sat down in the restaurant and had a look at the menu, Carol gave me a reproachful look and said: 'They don't serve meals here, Mario. This is not

food, these are just snacks; they don't even give rice with the dishes!' The American colleague and I enjoyed our meal. Carol, however, finished her food unwillingly and made it clear that this was the last time she would let me decide on a restaurant in India.

Carol also regularly gives me advice on how to behave in the guesthouse of her institute. When I once told her at the end of the day that I needed to step out to take my laundry to the neighbourhood *dhobi* (washer man), she was surprised: 'Why do you take the laundry yourself to the *dhobi*? Just ask one of the staff of the guesthouse to take it there and he will make sure that you get it back.' When I indicated that I can easily do it myself and also enjoy doing so because it allows me to go out for a walk and to see a bit more of the neighbourhood, she looked at me in disbelief.

One week later, however, I found out that it might not be a bad idea to follow Carol's advice once in a while. I had to go to the *dhobi* on three consecutive days before I finally could get my laundry back. Every time the *dhobi* gave me some reason or the other for the delay. Two days before my departure from Bangalore, I again had some clothes that needed washing and I was afraid that they might not be ready on time. I asked one of the staff of the guesthouse to take the clothes to the *dhobi*. To my surprise, I found my clothes washed and ironed in my room the next day already!

After all these years, I have finally decided to follow Carol's advice more often and to act a bit more like an 'Indian scholar of foreign origin' at her institute. Not to ask others to do those things that you can do yourself might be more in line with my Dutch upbringing, but it does not always make life easier in India.

Keiko

a Japanese cosmopolitan researcher

‘Anthropology has taught me a lot. I learned about the way people live in faraway places, but I also learned about my own family,’ Keiko (33) told me over dinner in a restaurant in Singapore.

Keiko is a Japanese anthropologist who has lived most of her life outside her country of origin. That afternoon we had been to a lecture at the National University of Singapore. The lecture about cosmopolitanism and world citizenship focused on artists, diplomats, businessmen and intellectuals. The audience had consisted of ‘world citizens’; almost no one from the audience had been born in Singapore and most of them would probably live in another place in the world in five years’ time. From their reactions and remarks during the discussion, I could tell that the audience identified with the examples given and agreed with the argument of an increasing cosmopolitan outlook among artists, businessmen and intellectuals.

But not Keiko. During the lecture I could see her become more and more upset. At the end of the discussion she had made a critical remark, but there had been no time left to pursue it further. It was only during our dinner afterwards that I realised that her remark had followed from her personal experiences.

Keiko had spent most of her youth in Europe. Her father was a scholar in chemistry who worked at various universities and research centres in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Over the years, their family had lived in Russia,

Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and France. Keiko had attended international schools in all these countries. Because of her father's work, the family was in contact with scientists and their family members from across the world. Some of them regularly visited their house and every once in a while they went on outings together.

'We had a wonderful time,' Keiko said. 'I felt at home in Europe and I always thought that my parents liked the international environment in which we lived. At some point of time, however, I found out that that was not the case. When I turned fourteen I was sent from Paris to Japan because my parents felt that I had become too westernised. I can still remember how shocked my mother was when she realised that I could not eat with chopsticks properly. Some French colleagues of my father were expected to arrive for dinner at our house, and my mother told me that I had to show the guests how to use chopsticks. When I told her that I could not do that because I did not know how to use them myself, my mother was deeply shocked. She could not believe her ears. Although we never ate with chopsticks at home, she had just assumed that I would know – being Japanese.'

Keiko's parents were equally upset about the fact that she dared to oppose her parents and even crossed her arms in front of her body while responding to her mother's request. They had assumed that the Japanese way of obedience and respect for the elder generation would have automatically been transferred to their daughter. When they also found out that Keiko's friends' circle not only consisted of Western girls but also of Western boys, they decided to send her to her grandmother in Tokyo to give her a 'proper' Japanese upbringing.

Between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, Keiko lived in Japan. For the first four years she lived with her grandmother and after that with her parents who had returned to Japan in 1992. 'I tried to adapt to my new life, but had a very difficult time. I missed the freedom I had had in Europe and was not allowed to have any contact with my friends there. As soon as I got my bachelor's degree, I applied for study programmes abroad. I got permission from my parents to do a master's in anthropology in Australia. They assumed that I would return to Japan after completing my study and marry a husband selected by them. But it turned out differently.'

After finishing her master's in anthropology, Keiko got a PhD scholarship in Australia and decided to stay on. She fell in love with an Australian man. When she tried to inform her parents about having a boyfriend in Australia, all hell broke loose. Her mother was furious: 'That Australian man can't get a woman; that's why he takes you. He comes from a low class family. Asian women will never be accepted in Australia; you always will be a second-rate citizen there.' When Keiko married her Australian partner, her parents cut off all ties with their daughter. Keiko has not seen them since.

It was her mother's outburst that Keiko was reminded of when she made her critical remark after the lecture on cosmopolitanism and world citizens that afternoon: 'People often give the impression that cosmopolitans are open and progressive world citizens who are free from norms and cultural traditions. We often only see the outer part of their behaviour and not what goes on behind the scenes. People who have lived in different parts of the world sometimes try to hold on even more to what they think are the traditional norms and values of their country of origin. They often think of culture as something that is static and part of our genes. Since I started studying anthropology I began to look at it very differently. Although I do not agree with my parents, I understand their motives better now. To compensate for their international lifestyle they tried to cling to Japanese culture by making sure it would be transferred to their children. It later became clear to me that my mother was referring to her own experiences as a Japanese woman in Europe when she said that Asian women are never really accepted in Western societies.'

'Anthropology has given me insights into my parents' behaviour, although it does not relieve me from the pain I feel. Even after my daughter was born, my parents did not contact me once. Maybe that is the irony of anthropology: it gives you insights into the complexity of human behaviour, but that does not always make it easier to cope with things.'

Amrapali

an independent Indian colleague

Amrapali Merchant (64) is a retired professor in sociology at the Sardar Patel University in Anand-Vidyanagar, a small town in central Gujarat, India. I have known Amrapali since 1986. Between 2010-2014 we co-supervised six students from the University of Amsterdam who did research on migration from the region. During the same period, Amrapali and I have conducted research on grandparents in central Gujarat who take care of their grandchildren while their parents live abroad.

Each time I am with Amrapali in India it strikes me how strongly her work and private life are interconnected. Meetings of our research project usually take place at her home and are regularly interrupted by students, colleagues, friends or relatives who come and see Amrapali. These visitors often ask her for advice, about the choice of school for their child, about a family matter, or they seek her help in getting a job. Once I was present when a student came whose parents wanted to marry her off as a result of which she had to discontinue her study. She asked Amrapali to persuade her parents to postpone the marriage, which she managed to do so. With great ease, Amrapali alternates such personal and sometimes highly emotional conversations with discussions about the progress of our research project.

Amrapali never got married. Being the eldest of four children, that wasn't an easy choice: 'When I was seventeen years old I already knew that I didn't want to get married but wanted to dedicate my life to society. I had just entered college and did a lot of volunteer work. I wanted to continue with that and not

to start a family. It was very hard for my parents to accept it, especially when I came into my mid-twenties. For my younger sisters it was also difficult, as they had to wait for me to get married first, being the eldest daughter. My father especially found it very hard and he did try to find me a husband. When I told him that I would get a divorce within a month if he would marry me off, he finally accepted my decision. He knew me since birth and realized that there was no point in forcing me to do something I did not want to.’

Most of her life, Amrapali has lived on her own. Being a woman, that is highly unusual in India and almost inconceivable in a rural town like Anand-Vidyanagar. It does not mean, however, that Amrapali is alone. Every time I visited her over the past 25 years, there are other people in her house. Most of the time, there are students waiting on her veranda and I often meet colleagues, politicians, friends, and relatives in the living room. Over the past five years Amrapali’s aging parents have lived with her. After a long illness, her father expired in 2012. Since then her mother has been bedridden. Amrapali takes care of her on a daily basis, supported by a nurse and by one of her former students. A year back, she helped her student in getting a part-time teaching job and supplements his income for the help he provides in taking care of her mother whenever she has to go outside for work.

Amrapali is a well-known and highly respected scholar within the university and within the surroundings of Anand-Vidyanagar. She regularly gives lectures and moves with equally great ease among the local power holders of civil servants and politicians, as within the circles of critical non-governmental organisations. She gets along well with representatives of political parties with differing viewpoints: from the secular Congress Party to the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Through the years I have regularly met local strongmen of the BJP at her home. In 2014, they had asked for her support in the national elections and had been unpleasantly surprised when Amrapali denied their request. Instead of that, she openly gave her support to the newly established anti-corruption Aam Aadmi Party (AAP): ‘Those persons (of the BJP) create divisions between Hindus and Muslims. I regularly participate in meetings and demonstrations that support religious cooperation and take a stand against those who try to encourage divisions within society.’

Such a point of view does not make one popular in central Gujarat, where the BJP has become the most powerful party and where divisions between Hindus and Muslims has increased strongly over the past decades. I was therefore not surprised when Amrapali told me that her decision to not lend support to the BJP had met with a negative response by her acquaintances in the party. After the landslide victory of the BJP in the elections, they have not contacted her once.

Amrapali's academic life is strongly embedded in local society. Her work and private life overlap almost completely. Each time I visit her home, I listen with great interest to her discussions with colleagues, friends and relatives. I have great respect for the way she helps her students and gives them personal advice. Although I could not see myself discussing personal issues with my students in Amsterdam, I admire the way she is so much locally embedded and I marvel at the way she continues to keep her independence.

Erwan

a democratic Indonesian dean

‘I have been the Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences since last October,’ Erwan Purwanto told me when we met in Indonesia in early 2013. I have known Erwan from the time he did his PhD at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). After his return to his home country Indonesia in 2004 he became a lecturer at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta. ‘I got 60 per cent of the votes in the election. I felt honoured that my colleagues had so much faith in me.’ When I asked him what he meant by ‘election’, he replied: ‘At UGM, the deans of the faculty and chairpersons of the departments are elected by the staff – just like they do at your university, isn’t it?’

When Erwan first came to Amsterdam in 1998, he had been impressed by the level of transparency and staff involvement at our university. ‘Back then staff members at UGM were appointed through nepotism. You only could get a job if you knew someone personally. When I studied in Amsterdam, I was jealous of the way things were done at the UvA, where decisions were taken on the basis of arguments. In those days, we could only dream of such things in Indonesia.’

Erwan’s remark made me realise that it was indeed not so long ago that heads of departments, directors of institutes and deans of faculties at our university were appointed on the basis of recommendations of the academic staff. In those days, staff members who occupied administrative positions acted as a *primus inter pares* – first among equals – within the department and faculty. I went on to recount how with the passage of the national law on the

‘Modernisation of the University Administration’ in 1997 by the Dutch parliament, this remnant of the democratic period was abolished at our university. Since then, administrators are appointed top down, without nominations or even suggestions from the academic staff. The staff is only informed about the appointment of a new dean or chairman – positions that are revealingly referred to in the current management jargon as ‘hierarchical executives’.

Just before I left for Indonesia, I had had a first-hand experience with the newly established administrative culture in our university. Following non-transparent decision making, a new staff member was hired in our department. When some of us asked the administrators at the departmental and institutional level for an explanation, they referred to the decision makers higher up in the university – ‘the dean wants it this way’; ‘the board of governors has decided this’ – or alluding to the hierarchical relations of our university, they said: ‘We don’t need to consult you, we have the power to decide this independently.’

‘It seems as if decisions are taken in your institution the way it was done here during the Suharto Regime,’ Erwan remarked insightfully after hearing my story. ‘During those days, everything in Indonesia was organised from the top down. In the end, this authoritarian system disintegrated. After widespread protests Suharto was forced to resign in 1998, followed by the implementation of the *reformasi* (reformation), which made our country democratic. This was also the case at our university. Before 1998 the academic staff had no say at all; deans and chairmen were nothing more than an extension of those above them. Elections were introduced with the *reformasi*. In the long run, it seems that democracy is the only system that works, because of its ‘checks and balances’. That’s what we learned from you in the West. Since 1998 the faculty deans and departmental chairs are chosen by the academic and supporting staff.’

As the newly appointed dean, Erwan operates as a *primus inter pares* among his colleagues and makes it a point to defend their interests against higher ups when necessary. ‘Of course I also have to sometimes take difficult and painful decisions as dean, but I always try to take into account the views of my colleagues in the faculty.’

Erwan's intention to act as a *primus inter pares* was clearly visible in his first decision as dean. 'Being the dean I am entitled to a considerable financial raise in pay. After taking office, however, I decided to lower my salary by 30 per cent so that I would not earn more than a regular professor in the faculty. My colleague in Anthropology, who had become the new dean of the Faculty of Arts, did the same. Both of us also had the right to choose a new company car and to live in a staff residence on the campus, but we turned that down. We think that education and research should be the core activities of our faculty and we therefore thought we should spend as little money as possible on these kinds of luxuries. We now use the two staff residences [meant for deans] to accommodate guest researchers from other parts of Indonesia for free, while we use the dean allowances to provide additional scholarships for students.'

I listened to Erwan's story with increasing astonishment. Democracy, equality, and transparency had always been matters in which Western countries were supposedly leading; we were expected to teach 'non-Western' countries like Indonesia these things. Eastern societies are supposed to be characterised by hierarchy and inequality, as described for India by Louis Dumont in his renowned study *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966). 'Homo Equalis', with its emphasis on egalitarianism and equality, is supposed to characterise Western society.

Although one could question the accuracy of Dumont's dichotomy between Western and Eastern societies, Erwan's story made me realise that much has changed since Dumont's time, especially the ways in which universities are organised. While the University of Amsterdam has become over the past 20 years more and more top-down with 'hierarchical executives', scholars at the Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta now have a greater say in policy decisions at their university, where those in administrative positions increasingly operate as 'first among equals'.

Listening to Erwan's account of the recent democratic changes in his university made me wonder whether we in the West should sometimes look more to the East to learn how to ensure a system of 'checks and balances' in our university administration.

Jojada

a creative Dutch colleague

When our department was housed in the Spinhuis building of the University of Amsterdam, I had a room on the second floor and we had to pick up our printouts from the common printer in the hallway. Once, in 2006, when I was waiting for my printouts, several print jobs belonging to various colleagues were emitted out of the printer: draft chapters of students, printouts of academic articles, handouts of teaching modules, e-mails and their attachments, etc. I started to get impatient and was about to return to my room, when I suddenly found myself stared at by many eyes. The printer had spewed out several pages with eyes of different shapes and sizes printed on it: large eyes, small eyes, round eyes, blinking eyes, squinting eyes, eyes of men, eyes of women, eyes with make-up, and so on. I was intrigued and almost forgot to take my own printouts, which had finally come out of the printer by this time.

With all the different eyes on my mind, I began to walk back to my room. At that very moment, my colleague Jojada Verrips came around the corner, walking fast and slightly bent as usual, with a mischievous smile on his face. 'Of course!' I thought at once. 'Who else but Jojada could have given this print job? Who else on the second floor of the Spinhuis building keeps himself busy with such fascinating topics?!' A few months earlier I had been intrigued by pages with photos on cannibalism in Europe coming out of the printer while I was waiting for my printouts. That print job too was sent by Jojada.

Jojada Verrips was a Professor of Anthropology of Europe in our department. In August 2006, he retired. He gave his valedictory address at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam on his research project, *The Wild in the West*. In the evening there was a party with colleagues, friends and relatives in attendance, during which some of his colleagues from the Anthropology department sang old Dutch sea shanties.

For many years, Jojada Verrips was one of the pillars of the anthropology programme at the University of Amsterdam. He was a very committed teacher, who was loved by his students. Many generations have benefitted from his inspiring lectures. He also wrote several beautiful books and articles. His book about his native village in the Alblasserwaard (*En Boven de Polder de Hemel*, 1977/2005) used to be compulsory reading for students of my undergraduate studies programme in Rotterdam and was the first anthropological monograph I read.

During his academic career, Jojada held several administrative positions. He was co-chairman of the department during the merger of the anthropology and sociology departments. I have come to know Jojada as an interesting colleague and as an extraordinary person. He was always highly involved in the work of colleagues and in the well-being of the anthropology programme. His outbursts during meetings were well-known. Many administrators thought of Jojada as someone who dragged his feet in the face of any proposed changes and who was always against them. I perceived his outbursts differently. His criticisms resulted from commitment to the discipline of anthropology. To me his anger was an illustration of the helplessness of someone who was strongly involved in academia and could not bear the sight of administrators taking decisions that would negatively affect the quality of our teaching and research activities. In retrospect, Jojada's criticism often turned out to be justified, although the administrators would never admit to that openly.

It is sad that people with expertise and commitment like Jojada are viewed within the present-day *modus operandi* of the university as being a problem, and as obstructive and incapable of performing administrative tasks. Overall, there has been a tendency in academia to give preference to managers who have no experience in research or teaching, or to give those tasks to academics

known to lack vision or creativity. It was partly due to his resentment against this that Jojada decided to organise his farewell speech outside of the university in another institute. I could understand his decision to do so, but think it's a pity and something that we should take to heart.

If the university has become a place where creative and committed scholars like Jojada no longer feel at home, there is something seriously wrong. In the uncertain times of the present with its big social changes, we do not need managers who are just another face in the crowd. We need creative and committed academic personalities like Jojada Verrips to train new generations of students and to give new directions in research.

For as long as we were in that building and even now, I regularly stand in front of the printer, waiting for my printouts. Once in a while I stare at printouts of colleagues, hoping to see images about the *The Wild in the West*. I am mainly confronted with printouts related to administrative matters and it dawns on me a little more each time that Jojada has retired. After his retirement, Jojada continued to do research and gives guest lectures regularly. I hope that someday he will still find the time to come to our department and will ask us to print something for him. It would go against the university's cost-cutting policy, but it would bring us pleasure and stimulate creativity – maybe not so much the creativity of the administrators and managers at the top, but certainly of me and of many of my colleagues in the Anthropology department.

Alakh

a multi-task Indian director

When I entered the *Institute for Human Development* (IHD) in Delhi on a Sunday morning in 2005, Professor Alakh Sharma was already in his office. Alakh is the director of IHD and I collaborated with him for a research project on the informal sector in India. I reached the doorway of his office, and Alakh who was on the phone waved and invited me over. He gave me a hand and pointed to one of the two sofas in front of him. There were already three persons in his room, two of whom I knew from my earlier visits. The two I knew were Dr. Reddy and Dr. Deshpande, retired professors from Bombay and Hyderabad respectively who helped Alakh with a research project that IHD conducted for the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO). The third person in the room was Alakh's assistant who was sitting at his desk, holding a notebook in his hand and waiting for instructions.

I said hello to everyone and quickly got into a lively conversation with Dr. Reddy and Dr. Deshpande. Alakh was still on the phone. That week IHD was organising two conferences and Alakh was busy finding a few extra chairmen and discussants for both meetings. In the meantime, he went through a pile of papers on his desk and edited two draft letters, which he then handed to his assistant. All these activities did not prevent him from also joining our conversation every once in a while simultaneously. After a few minutes his mobile phone started to ring. He answered it as well in the midst of all this. It turned out to be a mutual friend and colleague of ours from Ahmedabad. Alakh called me over and told our colleague from Ahmedabad: 'Mario Rutten just entered my room; he wants to say hello to you.' Before I knew what was

happening I held Alakh's mobile in my hand. Alakh used the opportunity to end the conversation on his other phone and in between he also took part in my telephone conversation with our common friend from Ahmedabad.

About an hour later Alakh indicated that it was time for lunch. Every day the staff members of IHD have lunch together at a table in the hallway. Everyone brings their own lunch from home in tiffin boxes. For Alakh and his guests though, lunch is cooked on the terrace and usually consists of *chapatis*, rice and vegetables. As a guest, you regularly get some food from the lunchboxes of the staff. They come from different parts of India and want you to taste some of their home dishes. With Alakh around, it is impossible for guests to refuse this hospitality; he personally makes sure that we all taste each and every dish the staff has brought from home.

Alakh is a remarkable person. I have not met anyone with so much energy and with such a wide social network, both within and outside India. Alakh is able to undertake many activities at the same time and do so with enthusiasm that rubs off on others around. He gets his staff to be actively involved in things. Even on Sundays several staff members are often present at IHD, busy completing work with great dedication.

Alakh's office is always an open house and is the control room of all the activities of IHD. There are always visitors in his office with whom Alakh is interacting, while continuing to perform some other activities. He regularly takes his visitors out for dinner in the evenings. The next morning he is back in the office early. Despite knowing him for many years, I still looked at his way of operating with great admiration, but I sometimes also asked myself in disbelief how long he will be able to keep up with this lifestyle.

Shortly after my return from Delhi, we were visited by the committee that evaluated anthropology programmes in the Netherlands. After two days of meetings at the University of Amsterdam, the chairman of the committee informed us that he was shocked by the enormous increase in workload in our department. Over the past eight years, the student-teacher ratio had more than doubled. He was even more surprised by the fact that none of the staff members had complained about it in their meetings with the committee. 'Had the staff informally agreed not to express its complaints to the committee?' the

chairman asked himself. Although this might have been part of the reason, the main explanation for it is to be found in the fact that we have several Alakh Sharma's in every department of the University of Amsterdam.

A few weeks after the visit of the evaluation committee, I was informed by a colleague in Delhi that Alakh had been to the hospital for a check-up. I immediately called Alakh and asked whether he was all right. As optimistically as ever, Alakh first told me that there was nothing to worry about – it had been no more than a regular check-up. When I insisted he told me that he had felt a bit more tired lately and had therefore gone to the doctor. After several tests, the doctor had given him a clear warning. His blood pressure was too high and he therefore had to slow down. Although over the phone Alakh seemed to be taking it all lightly, I was later told by our mutual friend from Ahmedabad that Alakh had taken the warning of the doctor seriously. He hired some extra staff and had also decided to sometimes take a Sunday off. I was glad to hear that and was wondering if we would also be able to do the same someday in the future, if the university did implement the advice of the committee to lower the workload within our department.

Ambalal

an Indian farmer and sociologist

During my visit to Gujarat, India in 2014 I met Ambalal Patel (76) once again. The *puja* for my renovated room in my study village had just been completed when he suddenly showed up. Ambalal's village neighbours 'my' village, and when someone told him that morning that I was in the area, he had decided to come and see me. We had a lot to catch up on.

When I first came to India in 1983 to conduct research for my master's thesis, Ambalal's house was my first experience with village life in India. As a student in development sociology I could not have wished for a better introduction into Indian society. Ambalal was a farmer and a professor in sociology at the local university. In his day-to-day activities, he moved with great ease and with much self-evidence between the academic world and village society. After giving instructions to his agricultural labourers in the morning, he would go on his scooter to teach at the university in the nearby town. Towards the end of the afternoon he would return to the village and often go out to check the condition of the crops in his farm.

During my first research period in India, I lived in Ambalal's house for three weeks. He taught me much about Indian sociology and about the ways in which the caste system functioned in village life. He also gave me a crash course in agriculture. I accompanied him on his trips to his farm, during which he gave me 'exams' to test my ability to recognise agricultural crops and name the activities performed in the fields.

In the years thereafter I visited Ambalal and his wife Sharada whenever I was in India. He was always very interested in my research, willing to give me advice and to help me establish new contacts whenever I asked for help. Once in a while I stayed with them in the village, where I used to hang out with their three sons who were of my age. We could get along well, in spite of the fact, or maybe because of the fact, that we had very different interests. While I had come from the West to learn about Indian society, Ambalal's sons wanted to migrate to the West, and asked me all kinds of things about life in Europe.

From the end of the 1980s onwards, the three sons migrated to the USA one by one. All of them did so by marrying into Gujarati families living in the vicinity of New Jersey. After Ambalal retired from the university, he and Sharada decided to also migrate to the USA in order to be with their children and grandchildren. He leased out his land and closed his family house in the village. Ever since, I had found the door locked whenever I went to see them. The neighbours told me that Ambalal and Sharada did return to India, but only once in every few years to stay in the village for a couple of months. During all those years, there had been no overlap between our visits to India. When we met in 'my' village in 2014, I had therefore not seen Ambalal for more than ten years.

Ambalal and I had a lot of catching up to do: about our mutual acquaintances, my research, and the well-being of both our families. He said that he had just stayed in his village for three months and was about to return to New Jersey. Sharada had already gone back a month ago: 'She does not want to stay in India any longer; two months are more than enough for her. Whenever she is here, she misses her grandchildren. She also finds it difficult to get used to living in the village again. Everybody watches you there. She cannot get used again to the elaborate way of preparing food and the fact that she has to serve the guests who come to our house. She finds that annoying now and feels much more at home in America.'

Unlike his wife, Ambalal enjoys living in his home village and is not greatly looking forward to his return to the USA. 'I love being back here. In America, I miss the social life. I sometimes wonder whether I took the right decision by migrating to America. I volunteer in a Gujarati organisation in New Jersey, but that is quite different from what I used to do here in the village. Here

everyone knows me. I used to be one of the leaders of the village and they often asked for my advice. Being a man, life in India is much easier than in America. In America I have to take public transport and I also have to regularly help in household work.’ And with a wink, he added: ‘I remember how you used to tell us that you assisted in household work at home, and that it was very normal to do so in Holland. I do the same in America and I now understand better why you like it so much in India. Here everything is done for you, you only have to sit down when the food is ready and eat your meal!’

When he was leaving, Ambalal pointed out that in other respects too our positions have been partly reversed: ‘Thirty years ago I lived here, in my village, and you came from Holland to stay with us once in a while. I used to tell you how everyone was doing and what changes had taken place in the countryside. Today, my house is empty and I only come here every couple of years for a short period of time. You, on the other hand, sometimes visit India two or three times a year; you have built your own room in the village and I have to find out from you what has happened in the region over the past few years!’

Miscellaneous





Guan with friends in Genting Highlands, Malaysia.



Santudas (top row, fifth from left) with part of his joint family in Gujarat, India.



Sanderien and Isabelle while filming in London (photo Darshan Patel) .



Ignace (right) with Rienne during cooking.

Guan

social background

Close to the end of one afternoon in 1994, I arrived in Genting Highlands, a holiday resort about 50 kilometres to the north of Kuala Lumpur. The main attraction of Genting Highlands is a large casino which runs 24 hours a day. I was travelling with five Chinese businessmen and their wives and had come from Kedah State in north Malaysia. One of the businessmen was Lim Peng Guan (43) in whose house I had regularly stayed in the course of the previous months. During one of my stays he had invited me to accompany them on their annual outing to Genting Highlands.

After we had checked into the hotel, Guan introduced me to one of the managers of the casino. They knew each other from the time of their secondary school days in Guan's home town Alor Setar. The manager provided us with VIP cards, which gave us access to the lounge on the top floor. For the occasion, we put on a formal shirt and wore shoes, since Guan had told us before that T-shirts and sandals were not allowed in the VIP lounge of the casino. There was also a higher minimum bet for tables there as compared to the ones in the main casino rooms.

The VIP lounge was decorated glamorously and the guests were served free drinks and food. I stared my eyes out at all the wealth around me: men in silk suits with expensive watches on their wrists, women in beautiful evening dresses and expensive jewellery. Despite our attempt to dress for the occasion, we clearly stood out among the other guests who displayed all the trappings of exceptional wealth.

Accompanied by Guan I went from one table to the next. The large sums being betted made my head spin. Guan seemed to be less affected by it and played for a while on one of the blackjack tables with chips worth hundred euros or more. When I decided to check on our travel companions, I could no longer find them in the VIP lounge. Guan suggested that they had probably shifted to one of the main rooms and proposed that we should also go there.

We found our friends back at a roulette table on one of the lower floors of the casino. The room was noisy and full of cigarette smoke. They were happy here and didn't want to go back to the VIP lounge. Guan also made it clear that he felt more at home in this part of the casino. 'Let's stay here, Mario,' he said. 'It's much nicer here; there are more people and it's not that formal.' The minimum stakes did not seem to play a role in Guan's decision to not return to the VIP lounge, as he continued to bet equal sums of money playing blackjack.

After this incident, during our stay I did not pay any attention to their preference to gamble in the main rooms of the casino. Its meaning became clear to me only two weeks later, when I accompanied Guan to one of the illegal gambling houses in the countryside of Kedah State. Through a door at the back of a restaurant we entered a room with several gambling tables. More than 20 men were present; it was noisy and full of cigarette smoke. In between two games Guan referred to our earlier visit to the casino: 'I always like to go to Genting Highlands. It's beautiful, the hotel is very luxurious and the VIP lounge is wonderful. But if you ask me, I prefer these kinds of places. Here I can play cards and be myself.'

That same afternoon Guan also played golf with a business contact from Penang. Two years earlier he had taken golf lessons and had become a member of the golf club in Alor Setar. The club has a large part of the economic and political elite of Kedah State among its members and through his membership Guan had come to know several of them much better over the past year. Although these contacts had helped him in his business, he did not really feel at ease in the clubhouse. When this business contact informed him that afternoon that he would be unable to join Guan for dinner in the club because of some urgent matter in Penang, Guan was glad to return home early to join his friends for the weekly gambling. 'The clubhouse at the golf

court is beautiful, but not like here,' Guan told me at the end of the evening when we were having some food and beer in one of the pavement restaurants in Alor Setar. 'I prefer to sit here, eat and drink beer with my friends rather than drink whiskey in the bar of the golf club with people I don't really know.'

Late that night, on our way home, Guan told me that his business had grown over the past few years as a result of which he had more regular contact with businessmen in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Although he was proud of what he had achieved, he sometimes found it hard to cope with the social consequences. Born and raised in a rural town, Guan often felt a little uneasy operating in these business circles. It was for this reason that he had decided to send his two sons to a private boarding school in Kuala Lumpur, hoping that in the future they would feel more at home among the business elite of Malaysia. 'At their school there are children of big businessmen and politicians. They make friends over there and learn how to behave in those circles. That's important when they take over the family business.'

Doing research among Chinese businessmen in Malaysia meant that I had to adjust to a new environment with customs and habits different from what I was used to in the Netherlands. In one way, however, I immediately felt at home with Guan and his family. Given my own family history, I recognised the uneasiness that Guan felt when socialising in higher business circles.

My grandfather was a shopkeeper who had pursued several lines of business with changing success. The family belonged to the lower middle classes and could not afford to pay for my father's university education. Attending evening classes my father had worked his way up from being a salesman, selling butter to small shops, to being the marketing director of a large multinational company.

My father's successful career came with an increase in income and consumption, but also with uneasiness about our social position. Although my father's occupation and our income resembled that of the upper middle classes in the Netherlands, my parents never really felt at ease when invited for dinner by other members of the business elite. I still remember how relieved they used to be when they came home and could be themselves again, not

having to watch every move they made any more or think twice before making a remark.

A major difference though was that my parents, unlike Guan, had not chosen to send their children to a private school or put them into some elite sports club. Sitting with Guan and his friends in a local restaurant in Alor Setar, I was still grateful to them for that decision. My family's social background made it easier for me to understand the Chinese businessmen in the countryside of Kedah State.

Vipulbhai

marriage arrangements

Vipulbhai was 28 years old when I first met him in 1983. I was 25 and conducting research for my master's thesis in his village. We quickly became friends and I always try to visit him whenever I am in India. Including in 2005, when I was in Ahmedabad for a couple of days and rang to see if he might be home. 'You must come quickly,' he said. 'We are busy looking for a wife for Harish. We found a good family and they will be here tomorrow.' Harish was Vipulbhai's 22-year old son. I decided to go ahead and travel to their village the next day.

The excitement in Vipulbhai's home was palpable when I arrived in late morning. Female family members bustled in and out, helping with preparations and giving Harish advice on the fly about what to wear and how to act during the meeting with the girl and her family. The phone rang constantly as family members from other villages called to pass along information about the girl's family.

Vipulbhai and his father proudly explained that various families with daughters in tow had visited over the past month, but this 'offer' was looking extremely promising. The family was from one of the more prosperous villages in the matrimonial circle in which they as Patels from their village were expected to marry. Moreover, the family had a thriving tobacco business and was highly regarded in the Patel community.

Although I had shared in many events in Vipulbhai's family over the years, it was a new experience to be included as a member of the older generation in the family meeting regarding a potential marriage. When I met Vipulbhai in 1983 he was already married and living with his parents and younger brother, Sureshbhai. At the time, the family had been busy searching for a wife for Sureshbhai. I associated mostly with the younger generation, and spent many summer nights with Vipulbhai and Sureshbhai on the roof of their house. We talked about girls, about possible questions one could ask during the introductory meeting, and what life after marriage would be like. Sureshbhai had 'seen' a number of Patel girls by that point, and his parents were pressuring him to choose. They felt that Sureshbhai was putting the family's reputation in jeopardy with his 'pickiness', and other family members agreed. Sureshbhai and Vipulbhai made cracks about it to me at the time, and felt their family was needlessly making a fuss.

Twenty-two years later I found myself with Vipulbhai and Sureshbhai on the other side of the generation gap. Together with their wives, their parents and two other family members, we received the girl's family. We exchanged courtesies, drank tea and ate snacks. Most of all we observed the other party's behaviour and reactions. What they looked like, how they talked, how they acted with one another, and how they acted towards us. Had the children been raised according to 'the correct traditional' Indian values; did they respect their elders? After a little while, Vipulbhai's son Harish and the girl went to a room where they talked to each other for about 30 minutes. Shortly after they returned to the living room the meeting ended and the girl's family headed for home.

Before the family had even left the street the older generation had convened to discuss the matter. Vipulbhai and Sureshbhai's wives expressed fondness for the girl and her family. Vipulbhai and Sureshbhai's parents were not as forthcoming; their reticence suggested they wanted to leave the decision to Vipulbhai and his brother. However, in the hours that followed they spoke with Vipulbhai and his brother several times, and indicated that they would support a marriage. In fact, Vipulbhai's father made it very clear that he and his brothers would not appreciate it if this candidate should likewise end up rejected by their grandson Harish. He had seen a sufficient number of girls by

now, Vipulbhai's father said. Other family members had already hinted that he might be too choosy, and they were not pleased about it.

As the oldest son in the family and Harish's father, all eyes were on my friend Vipulbhai that day. Even though his younger brother Sureshbhai often took charge of the family business, Vipulbhai was fully respected during this family meeting. Especially that day it became apparent to me just how much he had grown over the years into his new role as future head of the family. His typical rowdy and boastful behaviour had yielded to a calmer personality. He listened to what the other family members had to say and subsequently had a long talk with his son.

Later that night when I had a moment alone with Vipulbhai, he told me that he had reached a decision. Although his son had still not been entirely convinced after meeting with the girl, he had made it clear that she would fit well into the family and was very suitable as a spouse. 'You cannot keep doubting and wanting to see more girls,' he had told his son. When I cautiously reminded Vipulbhai that his father had said something similar at the time of Sureshbhai's wedding 22 years ago, he stared at me in amazement and said that this was really not a comparable situation.

I suddenly realised that whilst Vipulbhai had grown into his new role, my role, too, had changed, and I needed to adapt my behaviour accordingly. I had always supported him and his brother in their mild defiance towards their parents. Often I was able to express my surprise about the older generation's decisions without any trouble. Neither Vipulbhai nor his brother had a problem with criticism regarding parental conduct and motives of the adults; in fact, it often prompted interesting conversations that in some cases were helpful for my research.

Now I had become part of this older generation, and therefore I had to be more careful about what I said about it. Vipulbhai's new role as future head of the family brings tremendous responsibility. As his friend, he no longer expects discussions about the establishment from me, but rather support when making difficult decisions.

Santudas

social science upside down

During the past few years, 'kangaroo homes' have been cropping up in the Netherlands. These are houses comprising two units, each with its own bathroom, living room, kitchen and bedroom. A connecting door or stairs allows occupants to move between the units. Kangaroo houses are intended for people who wish to lead their own life with their family whilst simultaneously caring for either elderly parents or a disabled child. The construction of these homes is part of the Dutch housing policy and politicians regularly call for its accelerated implementation.

Building kangaroo homes seems to be a reaction to the realisation that the process of individualisation in the Netherlands has gone too far, and that we need new forms of solidarity in order to reverse this trend. Individualisation and solidarity were themes that occupied classic social scientists such as Max Weber and Karl Marx more than a century ago. In those days, the dominant view was that the rest of the world could learn from earlier developments in Europe. In the introduction to the first edition of *Capital* (1867) Marx writes: 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.'

Similar assumptions regarding evolutionary developments were at the centre of the rise of social sciences in the 19th century and still sometimes inform opinions on modernisation, development and globalisation. In the past, societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America were largely regarded as case studies for gaining a better understanding of European social histories. In

some circles, people still assume that 'Non-Western' societies can and must learn from developments in 'Western' societies, whilst Europe has little to learn from countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In that sense it is hardly surprising that the kangaroo house is presented in the public discussion in the Netherlands as a *new* form of solidarity whereby only other European societies are cited as an example in some cases.

During a previous stay in rural India I explained the concept of the kangaroo house to my friend Santudas (65). His immediate response: 'That's just like our house, except without the connecting door!' I have known Santudas for over 30 years and I always stay with him in the village when I am in India. His family represents four generations, thirteen people in total, all of whom live in a single house. The farming business and small tile factory are communal property and operated jointly by Santudas and his brother, together with their sons. They decided fifteen years ago to divide the inside of the house. Santudas' younger brother and his family took up residence upstairs, where a makeshift combination living room-kitchen was built. Santudas and his family use the kitchen and family room downstairs. Their 89-year old father alternates between taking his meals upstairs and downstairs.

Can we call the introduction of kangaroo houses a new phenomenon, or should we see them more as a return to earlier forms of cohabitation? Santudas has been convinced for years that I come to India for the sake of teaching students in the Netherlands about his culture in order for us to learn from it. 'You people want to know how we in India can grow so quickly by living together as a joint family. I am convinced that in a decade your students will be asking their parents: why did you send us away? We need to continue living together so that we can grow faster.'

Of course my friend Santudas is exaggerating and conveniently forgets how the younger generation in his family often feels oppressed by living with their extended family. At the same time, his words illustrate that a great deal has changed since Marx and Weber with respect to the relationship between 'West' and 'Non-West'. Consequently, you could ask whether it might be more relevant anthropologically to reverse Marx's analysis by stating 'the country that is less developed industrially shows the more developed the image of its own future.'

Instead of studying current developments in the ‘Non-West’ in relation to Europe’s past, it is just as important for us here in Europe to draw lessons about the future of Europe from studies on developments in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This call for a reversal in comparative studies of ‘Non-West’ and ‘West’ is not a new idea. In 1882, Indologist F. Max Müller was giving lectures to colonial officials in Cambridge, which would later be compiled in the book *India: What can it teach us?* (1883).

‘True, there are many things, which India has to learn from us; but there are other things, and, in one sense, very important things, which we too may learn from India. ... Take any of the burning questions of the day – popular education, higher education, parliamentary representation, codification of laws, finance, emigration, poor-law, and whether you have anything to teach and to try, or anything to observe and to learn, India will supply you with a laboratory such as exists nowhere else.’ (Müller 1883/2003: 5 and 10)

Living in his village in India, my friend Santudas had arrived at the same social science reversal. And now those of us in Europe!

Sanderien and Isabelle

film and research

Between 2008 and 2010, Sanderien, Isabelle and I made a documentary on Indian youngsters who have come to London to work or study. A few years earlier, Sanderien and Isabelle graduated from the University of Amsterdam, specialising in Visual Anthropology. Since their graduation, both of them have made several documentaries on a freelance basis, while holding regular jobs at the same time. In our project, Isabelle operated the camera, while Sanderien and I took care of sound, and did the interviews. In the final stages, Isabelle and Sanderien edited the film. Over the years, we went to London ten times and stayed with the youngsters for three to five days on each visit. In 2008, we visited India for three weeks to film the wedding of four of the youngsters, and to meet the parents of seven of them.

I was using the documentary medium for the first time in my research activities. So, during the preparatory phase of this project, Sanderien and Isabelle tried to make me understand that making an anthropological film is different from doing anthropological research. ‘We don’t want just talking heads. We not only want the youngsters to talk, but we also want to make it visually appealing,’ they explained. Although I did my utmost to try and adapt to this new way of working, I had to be reminded periodically: ‘That’s an interesting idea for our story line, Mario, but how do we capture that in images?’

Over the initial months, I not only had to learn how to translate my research ideas into visuals, but also to do the interviews differently. I had to become physically smaller, for one. Sanderien and Isabelle are each about 1.60 meters

tall and I'm a little more than 1.80 meters. To make sure the youngsters we were interviewing looked straight into the camera, I had to squat when asking them questions.

I also had to learn to be less 'present' during the interviews. As a researcher, I had found that making brief remarks and asking short follow-up questions in-between were good ways of getting extra information. That strategy had always worked in my field research, but it turned out to be a major problem when making a film. Sanderien and Isabelle told me to not say anything at all while the youngsters were talking in front of the camera. They also urged me not to react immediately when someone seemed to have come to the end of their reply. 'Long uninterrupted shots and periods of silence following a reply will come in useful when editing,' they told me.

To remain silent has never been a strong point with me and it took me some time to master the art. After a while I noticed that by not reacting immediately I was sometimes able to provoke unexpected remarks from the youngsters, which turned out to be important for our film. Working together on this project, Sanderien and Isabelle succeeded in keeping me quiet for long stretches of time, something my colleagues and family members had never been able to do!

Sanderien and Isabelle also had to modify their behaviour during the making of the film. For instance, they had to learn to reign in their expressiveness. Both of them like to 'show' their enthusiasm when they find something beautiful or nice, but now they had to learn to be restrained. 'Don't tell them that you like something, because if you do, they immediately want to give it to you,' I warned them, right at the outset, drawing on my experience in India. 'And, remember, while eating, if you don't say that you like the food, you disappoint them and they get worried, but if you emphasise too much that you like the food, they see this as an encouragement to make you eat more!'

On our visits to London, we stayed with the youngsters in their paying guest accommodation, and during our trip to India we stayed with one of their families, in their village home. On all these occasions, we were often overwhelmed by the celebrated 'Indian hospitality'. Darshan and his friends, for instance, did not allow us to spend even small amounts of money during

our stay – even for personal items like toothpaste or shampoo. Although Sanderien and Isabelle greatly enjoyed their visits to London and India, they found it difficult to accept all aspects of Indian hospitality. But they got a chance to return the kindness and also to make the youngsters understand that too much of even a good thing can be difficult to digest.

During one of our visits to London, Darshan told us that he, with his wife Pinal, and his closest friend from the village, Satyam, would like to come to the Netherlands on a five-day holiday. All three of us were excited about their visit and saw it as a chance to recompense them for their generosity over the years. I helped them with their visa application and put them up in my house. Sanderien and Isabelle organised an itinerary, covering the city of Amsterdam, the windmills, the beach, and the tulip fields. Our guests enjoyed their stay in the Netherlands very much, although Darshan took some time to get used to the idea that he was not the host this time round. During the first day of their stay, Darshan tried to pay for the tickets of the canal cruise and for our lunch in a restaurant. We wouldn't let him, of course, and although it took a while, he finally stopped insisting on paying the bills. We also tried to present them with the souvenirs they wanted to buy for themselves. They found it difficult to accept this, though they had always overwhelmed us with their generosity during our visits to London and India.

Towards the end of their stay in the Netherlands, Sanderien and Isabelle succeeded in bringing home one more message to the youngsters. One evening we were at Isabelle's place and she had cooked a vegetarian meal for Darshan, Pinal and Satyam. The youngsters complimented Isabelle after a hearty meal, and Darshan said they liked the food very much. Sanderien and Isabelle immediately filled up their plates again, persisting despite their protests. Our behaviour puzzled the youngsters no end, but when Sanderien and Isabelle gave them the presents we had secretly bought for them that day, Darshan finally got the message. 'Oh, this is your way of taking 'revenge',' he smiled, looking a bit dazed.

In making this documentary, therefore, Sanderien and Isabelle made two near-impossible things happen: One, they managed to keep me quiet for reasonable stretches of time, and two, they made Darshan and his friends understand that even generosity can be stifling if one goes overboard.

Ignace

shared anthropology

In August 2013 I made a short film about our family friend Ignace (57). The film was the end result of a summer course in visual anthropology at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Given my long experience with ethnographic fieldwork, I had expected to only learn about filming and editing and was therefore surprised that I also gained new insights into anthropological research methods.

Last year Ignace lived with us for eight months. During this period, she regularly prepared delicious Indonesian food. Ignace cooks by touch, following family recipes that she was taught during childhood by her mother and aunts. As I wanted to learn how to prepare the dishes myself, I regularly sat with Ignace in the kitchen. I observed her closely and noted down what ingredients she used in what exact quantities and in what order. When I was told that I had to make a film about a specific event or action for the visual anthropology course, I immediately decided to make cooking by Ignace the theme of my film. The observations I had made earlier would make it relatively easy to make such a film, so I only needed to focus on the filming and editing. Or so I thought.

During the early stage of test shooting itself new information began to come to the surface. Each time I had observed Ignace in the kitchen previously I had been surprised by how quickly she had completed her cooking. During the test recordings, however, I could not record the last part of her cooking because I

ran out of tape. It is the relaxed way in which Ignace works that gives the impression that cooking comes natural to her and does not take much time.

When I watched my trial recordings I realised that Ignace's cooking is divided into the phases of preparation, cooking and cleaning, but that each of these phases again consists of smaller parts. When Ignace has prepared one dish and starts cooking, she begins to make preparations for a second dish, simultaneously cleaning and putting away tools and ingredients she no longer needs. Such knowledge about the different phases of an event or action is important for the editing process. A major aim of editing is to shorten an event or action in a realistic way. Although I had observed cooking by Ignace many times before, it was only when I carefully studied the trial recordings that I understood the need to edit the sequences of the different phases into the rhythm of the film.

The other thing that visual anthropology highlighted was that Ignace hardly ever cooks alone. While Ignace cooks, my wife Rienke often keeps her friend company. They talk about all kinds of things and often play games together on their iPads. During the editing process, it occurred to me that Rienke does not do a stroke of work during this time. They continuously chatter, so much so that I could hardly find moments of silence in the recordings where I could make cuts in the editing process.

Over the past few months, I had regularly noticed the presence of other people when Ignace was cooking, but I only realised the importance of such company to Ignace when I went through some parts of the recordings with her. Particularly striking was her response when I asked her what cooking means to her: 'For me cooking is... very relaxing... I like it when Rienke comes home around 6 pm... and I am busy cooking ... and she just sits at the table and we chat about all kinds of things. That's part of cooking. At those moments, I don't mind that nobody does anything. I don't mind it at all that nobody helps... but I do enjoy the chatting.'

The reaction by Ignace to the recordings therefore helped me with editing as it gave me a better understanding of what the film should be all about: cooking is something Ignace does alone *and* at the same time in the company of others. That insight gave the film its title: 'Cooking Alone Together'.

Looking at recordings together with the main characters is an important part of anthropological filming. Through this method of feedback and elicitation you achieve what the visual anthropologist Jean Rouch calls 'shared anthropology'. Such collaboration between the informant and the anthropologist often gives new insights, as it did in my case.

An important characteristic of visual anthropology is the combination of film and research. Making observations and trial recordings, and having a feedback session enabled me to make a film that gives a realistic picture of the way in which Ignace prepares a meal. Through the use of 'shared anthropology' I realised that cooking to Ignace is a social event for which she does not want any help. The joy of cooking in the presence of others who do not lend a hand became the theme of the film.

I attended the course in visual anthropology to learn filming and editing and got a new experience in anthropological research methods at the same time.

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