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*“Na Índia é que é!”: a construção de “Índias Incríveis” em Varanasi e Goa por migrantes associados a estilos de vida*

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# “India has got it!”: lifestyle migrants constructing “Incredible Indias” in Varanasi and Goa

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*Mari Korpela*

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Hundreds of lifestyle migrants repeatedly spend long periods of time in India; they return to specific places where they meet others leading the same lifestyle. Some appreciate the spiritual aspects and some learn Indian music, whereas others are simply searching for a relaxed life. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork among lifestyle migrants in Varanasi and Goa. The lifestyle migrants in Varanasi appreciate “authentic ancient India” whereas those in Goa celebrate a discourse of freedom. In this article, I discuss what that authenticity and freedom mean. I argue that India provides a setting – a physical location – for these lifestyle migrants’ own performance of India. Interestingly, sections of the Indian population participate in these same discourses, although there is a social distance between the lifestyle migrants and local populations.

KEYWORDS: Goa, Varanasi, lifestyle migration, orientalism, authenticity, discourse of freedom.

“Na Índia é que é!”: a construção de “Índias Incríveis” em Varanasi e Goa por migrantes associados a estilos de vida ♦ As migrações conotadas com um determinado estilo de vida levam centenas de pessoas a deslocarem-se para a Índia repetidamente por longos períodos e a regressar a locais específicos onde encontram outras que optaram pelo mesmo estilo de vida. Alguns vão numa busca espiritual, outros aprendem música indiana, enquanto outros simplesmente procuram uma vida descontraída. Este artigo tem por base um trabalho etnográfico realizado entre migrantes deste tipo em Varanasi e em Goa. Em Varanasi concentram-se aqueles que apreciam a “Índia antiga autêntica”, ao passo que os que optaram por Goa celebram antes um discurso de liberdade. Neste artigo analiso o significado de autenticidade e de liberdade nestes contextos. Argumento que a Índia fornece um cenário, um local físico, para a representação da Índia por parte destes migrantes. Mais ainda, alguns setores de indianos participam nestes discursos, apesar de haver distância social entre os migrantes e as populações locais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Goa, Varanasi, migração conotada com um estilo de vida, orientalismo, autenticidade, discurso de liberdade.

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As the sitar wiped out the split-reed sax, and mantras began fouling the crystal clarity of rock and roll lyrics, millions of wild-eyed Americans turned their backs to all that amazing equipment and pointed at us [Indians] screaming: "You guys! You've got it!" (Mehta 1979: 6).

IN THE COLONIAL ERA, INDIA WAS ALREADY A POPULAR TRAVEL destination, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s it became a popular backpacking destination among hippies (see e.g. Hall 1968; Wiles 1972; Odzer 1995; MacLean 2006). Today, thousands of backpackers continue to tour India every year (see e.g. Hutnyk 1996; Wilson 1997; Hottola 1999). After their trip – whether it lasts for a week or for several months – tourists return home. Some people, however, like India so much that they go back again and again. They are not tourists searching for a temporary break from everyday routines; they spend several months in India every year. They can be conceptualised as lifestyle migrants. Lifestyle migration refers to a phenomenon whereby citizens of affluent industrialised nations move abroad in order to find a more meaningful and relaxed life, usually in places with lower living costs and sunny climates (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a, 2009b). The lifestyle migrants in India come from various parts of the world: Israel, North America, Japan, Australia and a number of European countries. In India, they often return to specific places where they meet others leading the same lifestyle. They claim to have found a better life there, and spending a lot of time in India plays an important role in their identity construction.

In the quotation at the beginning of this article, Gita Mehta, an Indian writer, describes the hippie era. She continues by asking what it actually was that the hippies thought India had. The same question guides this article: which is the India that attracts lifestyle migrants? In 2002, the Indian Ministry of Tourism launched an extensive international campaign entitled "Incredible India,"<sup>1</sup> which aims to lure foreign tourists to the country. Lifestyle migrants are not tourists but they do have their own understandings of "Incredible India" and it is those notions that this article investigates.

The data in this article comes from two ethnographic studies among lifestyle migrants, one in the city of Varanasi and the other in the state of Goa.<sup>2</sup> Both locations are common lifestyle migration destinations but, as I will describe, they are very different locations and, by comparing these two places, I am able to illustrate two very different discourses about India. It is notable that the lifestyle migrants tend to talk about living in India rather than referring only to the specific locations where they reside. Yet, it is important to note that

1 See <<http://www.incredibleindia.org/>> (last access in January 2017).

2 The research in Goa was funded by the Academy of Finland (Grant 2501138405) and the proof-reading of this article was funded by the School of Education, University of Tampere.

Varanasi and Goa are just two places among many where lifestyle migrants like to gather in India. Consequently, the discourses of these two locations are two among many, yet they offer a fruitful base from which to elaborate on the existence of very different understandings of India. The lifestyle migrants in Varanasi appreciate "the authentic ancient India" whereas those in Goa celebrate a discourse of freedom. In this article, I discuss what authenticity and freedom mean to them. I argue that India provides a setting – a physical location – for the lifestyle migrants' own performance of India. I also investigate the role given to the local Indian populations in these discourses. In the final part, I discuss how sections of the Indian population in Indian metropolises have recently started to participate in these same discourses, although at the same time there is a social distance between the lifestyle migrants and local populations.

#### THE CASE STUDIES IN VARANASI AND GOA

This article is based on two ethnographic studies in India. The first (Korpela 2009) focuses on the community of lifestyle migrants in Varanasi and the fieldwork, lasting for thirteen months, was conducted in two parts in 2002 and 2003. The material consists of interviews with the lifestyle migrants sojourning in Varanasi and with the locals working with them, as well as a detailed field diary of my participant observation. The second study (Korpela 2014a, 2016) focuses on lifestyle migrant families, and children in particular, in Goa. The material consists of interviews with children, young people, parents and people working with lifestyle migrant children in Goa, as well as drawing projects conducted with children and a detailed field diary of my participant observation. The fieldwork in Goa lasted for ten months and was conducted in three parts in 2011, 2012 and 2013.<sup>3</sup>

I refer to these lifestyle migrants as "Westerners" due to the fact that differences between Western nationalities often seem to disappear when seen in opposition to the "Indian other." These people themselves often use the term "Westerners." Therefore, in this article it is used as an *emic* term, in order to facilitate reading; it does not refer to any theoretical discussions about the distinctions between the East and the West. Nationalities are not entirely insignificant among the lifestyle migrants in India, but in the context of this article comparing the different nationalities is irrelevant and stating the research participants' nationalities would also be a risk to their anonymity. Nevertheless, nationalities are significant in that their passports enable these people to easily get Indian visas. Most lifestyle migrants are in India on tourist visas; some

3 Although my research focused mainly on children, this article does not discuss the children's perspective but the phenomenon as such.

have business or student visas. At the same time, Indian visa policies set the limits for their lifestyle; most lifestyle migrants need to leave India regularly in order to renew their visas. Yet, the relatively long tourist visas that India provides (often for six or twelve months) enable this lifestyle.

The lifestyle migrants in India whom I met during fieldwork were usually of middle-class origin. Their parents were, for example, teachers, lawyers and entrepreneurs. They were, therefore, typically not very well-off but nevertheless in relatively good financial standing. Most lifestyle migrants in India have completed secondary education, and many have also studied at further education levels. The majority are in their 20s, 30s and 40s but there are also older individuals. In Varanasi, men form the majority, whereas in some other locations there are more women. In Goa, both genders are equally represented. It is impossible to know the exact number of lifestyle migrants in Varanasi or Goa as most of them do not register officially but there are definitely hundreds of them. Finally, it is important to note that in spite of various differences (in terms of age, nationality etc.) among the lifestyle migrants in the two locations, they share the discourses presented in this article, and these discourses play a central role in how they explain and justify their long and repeated stays in India.

#### LIFESTYLE MIGRANTS IN “AUTHENTIC” VARANASI

Varanasi is considered one of the holiest cities of Hinduism. It is situated on the banks of the river Ganges in northern India<sup>4</sup> and is one of the oldest cities in the world, with a population of about 1.5 million. Hindu devotees believe Varanasi to be the permanent home of the supreme god Shiva. Moreover, according to Hindu beliefs, if one dies there, one attains liberation from the cycle of rebirth, as a consequence of which many Hindus come to Varanasi when death approaches and the city is home to much suffering. Varanasi is also an important pilgrimage centre. Diana Eck, an indologist, writes that “it is precisely because Banaras has become a symbol of traditional Hindu India that Western visitors have often found this city the most strikingly ‘foreign’ of India’s cities” (Eck 1983: 9). For many foreigners, Varanasi is the epitome of “Eastern” otherness (see Saïd 1978). The city also has a considerable Muslim population and it is a particular location for Muslims as well but foreigners tend to ignore the city’s Muslim heritage and concentrate on its Hindu aspects.

Varanasi is a very popular tourist destination among both foreign and domestic tourists. There are, however, also lifestyle migrants who return there

4 Varanasi is also known as Banaras or Kashi. On the process of how Varanasi gained the status of a holy Hindu city, see Bayly (2001).

year after year. The popular season for them starts in October and ends in May,<sup>5</sup> and there are 200-300 lifestyle migrants in Varanasi at this time. Most of them are 20 to 35 years old but there are also many 40 to 50-year-olds. Typically, they work in their native countries for a few months in temporary jobs such as waitressing, harvesting and nursing or in selling Indian textiles and handicrafts and then spend the rest of the year in India, living on the money they have earned. Once in India, most of them play Indian instruments, and some do yoga, meditation or charity work. A lot of time is spent socialising with friends. The most common activities include cooking and eating, playing music and smoking hash together.<sup>6</sup>

The "India" that the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi claim to have found is represented by them as, above all, an "ancient" and "spiritual" place. In a way, they agree with the "Incredible India" tourism campaign:

"I like Varanasi because it's something like the heart of India. So much going on also about Indian culture... [...] Varanasi is real India, still happening, and the religion that they practice here, religion is big part of daily life of the people living here, the local people, and it's a very old city, it's oldest actually existing city in the world." [Ivan, 45]<sup>7</sup>

In order to create national consciousness and pride, Indian nationalists in the colonial era adopted an orientalist discourse (see Assayag 2001), wherein India was characterised as an ancient and spiritual place in opposition to the materialistic West (see Edwardes 1967: 39; Fox 1992; Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993; Ludden 1993; Van der Veer 1993). Also, since gaining independence India has been successful in promoting an image of the country as a home of ancient wisdom, and this image has been promoted in the West too (see Bandyopadhyay and Morais 2005), particularly as a result of nationalist politics. Many tourists and lifestyle migrants embrace this image whole-heartedly; thousands of people travel to India each year in search of spirituality (see e.g. Allsop 2000; Giguère 2009), and there are countless *ashrams*<sup>8</sup> and *gurus*<sup>9</sup> offering spiritual advice and all kinds of yoga and meditation courses. The spiritual India is what many visitors seek, and Varanasi is often represented as, and understood to be, the ultimate epitome of it.

5 The period between May and August is extremely hot and wet.

6 Varanasi is the city of the god Shiva who is associated with using intoxicants, including hash (see Abel 2006: 148). Therefore, many Westerners there justify their smoking by claiming that it is part of the Varanasi way of life.

7 After each interview extract, there is a pseudonym for the interviewee and his/her correct age at the time of the interview.

8 *Ashram*: a spiritual hermitage.

9 *Guru*: a (spiritual) teacher or guide.

Orientalist discourse utilises the idea of authenticity: the Orient is understood to be authentic – both in negative and positive terms. For the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, the spiritual India is the “true,” “authentic” India. Authenticity is a concept that has been widely discussed in tourism literature (see e.g. MacCannell 1973; Pearce and Moscardo 1986; Cohen 1988; Urry 1990; Bruner 1991; Harkin 1995; Selwyn 1996; Wang 1999). MacCannell’s (1973) original claim was that tourism is a quest for authenticity: tourists feel alienated by their home societies and thus search for authenticity elsewhere. In this process, authenticity becomes to be seen as something genuine, true and original and it is usually seen in romantic terms, often referring to an “unspoilt” past in people’s imagination. Many scholars (see Wang 1999) have later argued that there are no originals, only endless reproductions and authenticity should actually be understood as a social construction.

Orientalist interest in India is not a recent phenomenon. By the 1780s, Western scholars were already paying attention to India (Edwardes 1967: 170), and Sanskrit texts especially were believed to reveal something fundamental about the human spirit (Edwardes 1967: 304). India was represented, particularly in the German critique of the Enlightenment, as a pure and innocent (authentic) lost paradise. The romantic interest in India was, therefore, inseparable from a critique of the European present. “The West” was characterised by rationality, progress, quantification and secularism whereas India came to represent a spiritual return to a superior past, characterised by unity and harmony (Halbfass 1988: 69-83). Obviously, orientalism in the Indian context is very much connected with the imperial project (see Saïd 1993) and it has been criticised also from a postcolonial perspective (Prakash 1990, 1994).

The lifestyle migrants in Varanasi often reproduce an orientalist representation of India. The following excerpt illustrates how among them India is sometimes represented as a place where cultural practices do not change over time.

“When [...] I tell my mother or the men, how the life is here, they are not so surprised because they had the same fifty years ago, before the war, the same... like milking the cows [...] My mother [milked cows by hand] until marriage... mountain life. It is almost the same life, also here. I saw oil lamps and it was like that. [...] It was the same when they were children.”  
[Anton, 32]

“Superficially, there are a few changes but it really hasn’t changed much and certainly for local people, it’s still the same sort of thing, for centuries.”  
[Paul, 47]

These comments obviously present a romanticised view; the interlocutors ignore many current practices and romanticise the past. This admiration for



the represented past is, however, like a game; the lifestyle migrants like to enjoy "the simple, traditional life" but at the same time they are not willing to give up contemporary conveniences and complain a lot about the backwardness of India. The "simple" life that the lifestyle migrants appreciate also means a "natural life." Many of my interlocutors mentioned that they like the fact that in Varanasi they live in a closer relation with nature than in their native countries.

"What I like the most here [in Varanasi] is maybe that you are not disconnected from nature. In a Western city, you never know how full the moon is, and it never has any effect on your life. [...] [Here] it's a huge difference: no moon, full moon, rainy season, hot season, people behave differently. [...] You're very connected to nature here, as much as you can be in a city. [...] There are monkeys, and birds and cows. They are a living part of the city. Without these animals everything would rot, everything would be stinking. They also give milk, even the cow shit is used for burning, for fertilising... as a mosquito repellent. [...] In a way, it's men and nature living together in symbiosis. I like many things here, they eat from banana plates, and [...] everything is recycled." [Noel, 31]

In Varanasi, cows, water buffaloes, dogs, goats and rats are visibly present in the streets and one must be constantly aware of monkeys that might snatch one's food. Thus, nature – in terms of fauna – is very close to everyday life. One also profoundly feels the extreme climatic changes, since most houses in Varanasi do not have air conditioning or heating. It is interesting that such a big city – a clearly urban environment – comes to be viewed in terms of natural life. In the framework within which the lifestyle migrants make such an interpretation, the naturalness is connected with the spiritual and ancient image of the city. They are using an orientalist discourse, essentialising the city with these types of representations.

The natural life is represented as "ancient", and thus also as "authentic." Moreover, as the first interview extract above suggests, the lifestyle migrants claim that this "Hindu religion" has a close connection with nature – for example in terms of the significance of sunrise and sunset and the cycle of the moon. At the same time, the lifestyle migrants criticise the modern, urban present, in particular the traffic and pollution; Varanasi thus becomes defined as an ancient natural city which is in danger of being destroyed by modernisation. When the lifestyle migrants define the city as a Hindu place, they essentialise both the city and the religion. For them, there seems to be a kind of "pure" Hinduism that can be experienced in Varanasi. This "pure" Hinduism has been promoted by the nationalistic Hindutva movement and by other nationalist movements since the Independence struggle (see e.g. Elst 2001), but this



socio-political situation and the vast diversity within “Hinduism” seem to be ignored by the lifestyle migrants.

For the lifestyle migrants, Varanasi is thus an ancient and spiritual city where life is authentic and natural. What does it actually mean to be a lifestyle migrant in this context then? What is it that the Indians “have got” and the lifestyle migrants also want? First of all, it means appreciating spirituality. Not spirituality in terms of becoming a Hindu, however, but a sort of New Age spirituality wherein an individual can choose from the “supermarket of spirituality” (Aupers and Houtman 2006) whichever combination of beliefs and practices pleases them at any one time. Varanasi thus offers the lifestyle migrants a beautiful and “authentic” setting for personal spiritual growth. Many of them combine beliefs and practices from Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism, in addition to being interested in practices such as tarot card reading and healing crystals. Being a lifestyle migrant in Varanasi also often means working on oneself, trying to find one’s “true” self and discovering what one “really wants to do in life”; the lifestyle migrants engage in eternal discussions about future plans and self-elaboration. In addition, being a lifestyle migrant in Varanasi means leading a slow-paced, natural life. For example, many of my interlocutors mentioned that they like the fact that in Varanasi they cook with natural ingredients instead of eating processed food with preservatives.

In the context of Varanasi, for lifestyle migrants spirituality is also connected with Indian classical music, which is also traditionally loaded with spiritual meaning. In fact, most lifestyle migrants in Varanasi study Indian classical music. Yet, instead of studying in formal institutions they take private lessons from local musicians, claiming this to be the authentic way to learn Indian music. For most lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, their days revolve around music; they have lessons, they practise and they attend concerts. Just as they essentialise the Hindu religion, the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi essentialise and orientalise Indian classical music; they talk about the music being “spoiled” by modern institutions and modern influences. Instead of seeing the music as a developing tradition (Massey and Massey 1976: 90), they seem to want to freeze it in the form they believe it had for centuries in the *maharajas’* palaces.

Many of my interlocutors in Varanasi talked about India as a school and emphasised the learning aspect as the main reason for their long stays. In addition to referring to their music studies and spiritual search, the lifestyle migrants consider the whole experience of being in India as educational; they have learned to survive in different circumstances from those they were used to in their native countries and have become used to seeing a great deal of poverty and suffering. This view of India as a school was also popular among the hippies in the 1960s and 1970s, as the quotation at the beginning of this article illustrates: India has “got something” that the hippies wanted to learn

about. In the case of lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, this "something" means ancient spiritual culture.

The emphasis on learning leads to an important distinction: the lifestyle migrants of Varanasi, in the same way as travellers in many contexts, carefully distinguish themselves from tourists. When they meet new people in Varanasi, one of their first questions is always "What are you doing here?," and in order to be accepted into the lifestyle migrants' social scene, one has to have a legitimate reason for one's long stay – in most cases, the reason presented is music studies. Being a mere tourist is not accepted and, in fact, the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi constantly differentiate themselves from short-term tourists via their activities, clothing and discourse. For example, the lifestyle migrants share a certain style; they all dress in a similar way. Their looks are quite shabby and many of them have dreadlocks. Women wear long loose dresses and men wear pants and long *kurtas*.<sup>10</sup> Most clothes are made of *khadi*<sup>11</sup> cotton, and sometimes even of raw silk. This style is different from the one that is popular among tourists (Norris 2008) and it is definitely very different from how local Indian people dress (who in turn dress differently depending on their class, age, religion etc.). Therefore, the lifestyle migrants seem to have created their own distinctive style, and through this they express their belonging to the group of those who have acquired something of the simple, natural, authentic life that the Indians "have got."

But there is an almost paradoxical discourse that is repeated by the same interlocutors. Although in the lifestyle migrants' discourse living in Varanasi is authentic, spiritual and natural, it is definitely not pleasurable. My interlocutors often emphasised that Varanasi is not an easy place in which to live: "It's very difficult, Banaras is tough life, they cheat you all the time. [...] It's the dirtiest city of all India and the people are the least educated from anywhere else that I've seen." [Rafael, 40]

Living in Varanasi is particularly challenging for women, who need to be careful in dressing "appropriately" (in loose-fitting and concealing clothing) and not going out alone at night (see Korpela 2006). In addition, there are constant problems with water, electricity and rubbish, the roads are potholed and the bureaucracy is ineffective. In fact, the lifestyle migrants commonly claim that life is so hard and "heavy" in Varanasi that one cannot stay there permanently and it is necessary to leave the city regularly to preserve one's mental and physical health. Mental health problems among foreigners are, in fact, a recognised phenomenon in India. This is sometimes referred to as "India syndrome" (Airault 2000: 53) and the explanation is that being exposed to a very

10 *Kurta*: a traditional long loose shirt.

11 *Khadi*: a homespun cotton that was promoted by Gandhi in order to encourage the production of Indian products and boycott Western ones during the anti-colonial movement.

different culture triggers mental problems. The lifestyle migrants in Varanasi do not, however, appear to lose their mental balance because of the cultural differences; they celebrate the differences but, at the same time, essentialise them in orientalist terms. They aim to pursue an authentic life in the heart of India and claim to appreciate “the ancient Indian culture.” They thus appreciate a timeless, strikingly homogeneous India understood in orientalist terms.

#### LIFESTYLE MIGRANTS IN THE “FREAKLAND OF GOA”

The state of Goa on the west coast of India was a Portuguese colony until 1961. While 66% of the population is Hindu, 26% are Christian, and Christianity is a significant part of the Goan culture. Goa is one of the wealthiest states (*per capita*) in India, and there is a lot less visible poverty there than in Varanasi. The population of Goa is more than a million. The economy is heavily dependent on international, and domestic, tourism (on tourism in Goa, see Noronha *et al.* 2002). Goa is also a popular lifestyle migration destination; since the hippie era there have been foreigners who return every winter, for years and even decades. Most lifestyle migrants stay in Goa from November until April. Nowadays, there are hundreds of lifestyle migrants in the state, with all ages represented, from those in their early 20s to those in their 70s. The older ones have usually been visiting India since their youth, and hence are different from the pensioners who migrate to warm countries on retirement (see e.g. Williams *et al.* 2000; King, Warnes and Williams 2000; Gustafson 2002; Casado-Díaz, Kaiser and Warnes 2004; Oliver 2007).

Goa was one of the most popular hippie destinations in the 1960s and 1970s. Hippies were attracted by the cheap living costs, the beautiful beaches and, as they understood it, the relaxed attitudes of the local population. In addition, as few of the hippies stayed during the monsoon months, they saw the weather there as being nice and warm. The hippies felt that life could be enjoyed to the fullest in Goa; swimming naked, partying with friends and consuming various drugs (see e.g. Odzer 1995). In the 1980s, this party life gave birth to the trance music scene. The 1990s were the golden years of Goa trance; huge parties lasted for days. The Goan beaches were crowded with trance enthusiasts rather than hippies, and drugs were available in abundance. In the new millennium, however, naked hippies<sup>12</sup> are a distant memory and even the trance scene has faded: the Goan authorities want to promote package tourism and have banned the wild trance parties hoping that this will lead to the disappearance of the drug scene (see e.g. Saldanha 2007). There are still

12 I have observed that even today Indian people sometimes call “Western” tourists “hippies.” When using the term, they are defining the tourists as “white,” “lazy” and “dirty.”

trance parties, but they are under tight controls: music played outdoors must stop at 10 p.m.

Nowadays, Goa is an increasingly common destination for lifestyle migrant families. Hundreds of families with young children repeatedly spend the winter months there. Most lifestyle migrants earn their living in Goa; they work in the tourism industry, very often informally. They design and sell clothes and jewellery, run restaurants and cafes, teach yoga and Pilates, work as homeopaths, give massages, and so on. Goa is thus additionally attractive because lifestyle migrants find opportunities to earn money there. Therefore, being a lifestyle migrant in Goa is more related to obtaining an income than it is in Varanasi. Yet, despite working, the life of the lifestyle migrants in Goa is relaxed; they typically work only part-time hours or only a few days a week.

The life of the lifestyle migrants in Goa is to a great extent a life of leisure; life revolves around beaches, pools and parties and often also recreational drug use. A lot of time is spent socialising with friends. The lifestyle migrants in Goa have found there a relaxed life, nice weather, beautiful beaches and great parties: "Here it is quite nice because by idea it is a city, but by location it is still a village... It is a paradise on earth." [Ines, 45]

As the comment above suggests, the lifestyle migrants in Goa seem to feel that they live in a relaxed and beautiful rural environment which, due to the many activities available, is not an isolated or boring area. The lifestyle migrants live in coastal villages and seldom visit the state's urban centres. For my interlocutors in Goa, living in Goa as an epitome of India means living in a natural environment, surrounded by sea, beaches and jungle:

"There is nature, there is jungle, there is beach. So the children are much more connected to the elements than being in a city somewhere in the West [...] So for the children, it is beautiful, and it's warm, it can open them. [...] My son is now ten years old and I am sure that eight of these ten years he has been walking barefoot. I think this is an advantage. Because it is really connected to the earth. There is no cement under his feet." [Nina, 39]

Among the parents, it is very common to say that in Goa children live close to nature whereas in the "West" they are distanced from it. Here, rural Goa is contrasted with the urban West. Many parents seem to hold nostalgic views of their own childhoods in the 1970s, "when children played freely in nature." Now, they want to provide their own children with a similar environment, and claim that it can be found (at affordable prices) only in Goa. Therefore, in some respects living in Goa means returning to the past, yet this past is defined differently from how the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi define the "authentic past" they have found there; in Goa, it is not a cultural past but a quest for a "natural state."

Low living costs are an important factor in the lifestyle migrants' life in Goa. Labour, in particular, is cheap there.

"I visited Olga, a lifestyle migrant mother of two children. She complained to me how her servant had just quit her job. Consequently, Olga had to do laundry, cook and clean herself. She was very upset and she burst out: 'I feel as if I was in Europe again.'" [Field diary, March 2012]

In Goa, lifestyle migrants can afford a lifestyle they could not have in their countries of origin. First, the majority live in spacious villas. Secondly, and most importantly, all of them hire domestic help. Many parents say that an important reason for having chosen to live in Goa is that they have more time to spend with their children than they would have in their native countries, which is possible because they do not need to work every day or do many household tasks themselves.

The lifestyle migrants I knew in Goa emphasised that they had managed to escape from the pressures of hectic lifestyles in their countries of origin to the relaxed and enjoyable Goa life. It is a rather hedonistic lifestyle and the lifestyle migrants seem to celebrate a discourse of freedom (see Korpela 2014b). They do not want to follow the norms of "ordinary society" and the path of "ordinary living." In Goa, they feel free to pursue the kind of life they value.

"India is a very corrupted country. If you want something, you have to pay. The same in Italy: you have to pay in order to get what you want. In the north – in Sweden, Finland and Norway – everything is well organised and you do not need to pay. But there you are not free, they chain you." [Lino, 48]

The *ethos* of the lifestyle migrants in Goa is epitomised by Lino's comment above; they represent Goa as a land of freedom where they can live as they want. Even if they work in Goa, they are their own bosses and can decide when to work and when not to. Being a lifestyle migrant in Goa thus means, above all, being free and independent. Arun Saldanha, who has studied the racial aspects of the trance scene in Goa, writes that being in Goa is a question of searching for freedom from the oppression of modern Western lifestyles; one can reinvent one's free self among the expatriates in Goa (Saldanha 2007: 31, 207).

This reinvention of the self leads to the significance of self-expression among the lifestyle migrants in Goa. This, in turn, becomes particularly manifest in their looks. Unlike in Varanasi, the lifestyle migrants in Goa are not searching for themselves but expressing the self that they (claim to) have already found.

There is a particular Goan fashion, especially in women's clothing. As with the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, their styles are very different from those of locals (who in turn have many different styles too) but also from those of "ordinary" people in their native countries. Women wear tight and revealing clothes; very often the garments are torn so that they expose a lot of skin. Anthony D'Andrea has called the Western women in Goa "techno Amazons" (D'Andrea 2007: 207), referring to their bold and masculine styles. The lifestyle migrant men also have distinctive styles, for example pants with many zips. Both women and men wear large sunglasses, many have big tattoos and dreadlocks, and all of them are tanned. Those lifestyle migrants who are fashion designers usually wear the clothes they sell. Many have their own distinctive styles, and D'Andrea (2007) has, in fact, called such people expressive expatriates. At the same time, the Goan fashion is a highly marketable asset, and many lifestyle migrants sell fashion garments to tourists and other lifestyle migrants in the markets.

For the lifestyle migrants in Goa, India is represented as a place where one can enjoy life and freely express oneself. Life in Goa thus becomes a sort of celebration of individualism (see Korpela 2014b). The emphasis is on enjoyment, individual freedom and self-expression. Goa is considered a "paradise" where one can put into practice one's alternative self in a beautiful, natural, relaxed environment. Unlike the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, those in Goa do not need to differentiate themselves from tourists, as everyone is celebrating a life of leisure; it does not matter what one does in Goa, it is enough that one has been "smart" enough to leave one's stressful native country.

Being in Goa is not a search for authenticity but a search for freedom. Above all, it is a question of sharing a relaxed, alternative scene with other like-minded people. A European journalist in Goa jokingly told me that the lifestyle migrants live in the "freakland of Goa," by which she meant the alternative social scene of the lifestyle migrants which is separate from the local social scenes. Living in Goa is thus not about searching for an authentic Indian culture and learning aspects of it, as living in Varanasi is, but about experiencing a hedonistic lifestyle of freedom and self-expression. Another important factor is that, in the lifestyle migrants' experience, local people seem to be permissive and laid-back. It is, however, important to point out that the lifestyle migrants are outsiders in Goa; local residents do not live in such a "freakland of freedom." Goa, and also Varanasi, thus offer settings for the lifestyle migrants' specific scenes and imaginaries concerning India, but engaging with the local populations does not seem to be important when the lifestyle migrants are enjoying India.



## THE (IN)SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL RESIDENTS

“It is almost midnight in Varanasi. I sit on a *ghat*<sup>13</sup> by the Ganges River where I am watching a jamming session of European music students. Several Indian instruments are played but there are no Indians present.” [Field diary, March 2003]

The diary excerpt above reflects the fact that the lifestyle migrants create their own social spaces within the public space in Varanasi. It is rather ironic that the lifestyle migrants were playing classical Indian music by the holy river of Hinduism, yet there were no Indians attending the event. On that particular occasion, some Indians walked by but did not try to join in the activities; there was an invisible boundary. In Goa, keeping a distance from local residents is also noticeable.

“On a hot afternoon in Goa, I attend a lifestyle migrant children’s party where about forty 2 to 12-year-olds are dressed up in various costumes. The party is finishing and all the children gather together in order to get a small gift bag. From behind the fence surrounding the party area, an Indian couple lifts their young child to see the party. The owner of the location, who is a lifestyle migrant, greets the family but there is clearly no intention to invite the child to join the fun; no costume or gift bag for him.” [Field diary, March 2012]

As in Varanasi, the lifestyle migrants’ social space in Goa is separate from that of the local residents. Therefore, the lifestyle migrants in these two locations seem to have found a better life in India but not with Indians; they create their own social spaces in the locations they choose to live in during part of the year. They are not “going native” in the sense of becoming similar to the local population, instead “going native” means becoming similar to the other lifestyle migrants in the respective locations. Therefore, the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi and in Goa can be understood to be performing or acting out their India, which does not require “authentic” Indian people (see Korpela 2010).

Distance from local people is more striking in Goa than in Varanasi. In the dense city of Varanasi, one is bound to interact with local Indian people on a daily basis but in the semi-rural environment of Goa, the lifestyle migrants do not need to interact much with local residents at all. In general though, having local friends turned out to be a problematic issue for almost all of my interlocutors, in both Varanasi and Goa.

13 *Ghat*: stone stairs leading to the Ganges river.



"Q: Do you have Indian friends?

A: Good question! [laughs] Very good question, yeah. It depends on the definition of a friend. [...] not really, no. And this is funny because the first time I went [back to Europe], a lot of my friends asked me 'but you are still in contact with Indian friends there. You continue to write or phone or whatever' and I was thinking suddenly that I don't have Indian friends really." [Donna, 28]

The lifestyle migrants' relationships with local residents in Varanasi and Goa are usually instrumental; their Indian acquaintances are landlords, shopkeepers, babysitters, cleaning ladies or music teachers. In other words, there is a service connection. Most lifestyle migrants I have met in India claim not to have any Indian friends. Many of my interlocutors in Varanasi mentioned that the "Indian" conception of friendship is very different from the "Western" one. They were thus suggesting that cross-cultural friendships are a contradiction in terms.

"Q: Do you feel different from Indian people?

A: [...] We [Westerners] want to make friendship and they [Indians] want money [laughs]. Maybe it's the main difference." [Sara, 32]

The lifestyle migrants in Varanasi thus justify not having Indian friends by referring to essential cultural differences. They define local residents as positively "authentic" in one respect, but when asked about possible friendship construction they represent them negatively, defining them as backward or greedy. The lifestyle migrants in Goa did not have this notion of local residents being "authentic" but they did share the view of backwardness. For example, when there were problems with a teacher in the school that most lifestyle migrant children I knew attended, some parents simply stated that the solution would be to bring in a Western teacher because "Indians cannot teach properly." In fact, even when they need local information, for example when they are looking for local services, the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi and in Goa usually rely on advice given by other lifestyle migrants rather than asking local people, because they do not believe that local residents would understand what it is they are looking for. Here, however, it is important to note that local residents are not necessarily interested in becoming friends with the lifestyle migrants either; the wish to keep a distance might be mutual. This is, however, only my impression and it is a theme that needs to be investigated further. It is nevertheless noteworthy that the lifestyle migrants are able to live in India in spite of this social distance from local residents. This clearly resembles colonial relations and it thus seems that the privileged lifestyles of lifestyle migrants reproduce colonial and racial hierarchies. Indians are, however, not

merely passive viewers of the various understandings of India that the lifestyle migrants celebrate.

#### INDIANS PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCOURSES OF “INCREDIBLE INDIAS”

Being a lifestyle migrant in Varanasi means being interested in the “authentic” India and studying some aspect of it – usually music. It also often involves serious contemplation of one’s own beliefs and aspirations. In Goa, being a lifestyle migrant means living a life of leisure and freedom. The emphasis is on fun, enjoyment and self-expression, and Indian cultures are strikingly absent from this discourse. The view of lifestyle migrants in Varanasi, of India in terms of authenticity, is obviously an orientalist and thus originally a Western construction, but the freedom that the lifestyle migrants in Goa celebrate is also a Western construction (see Korpela 2014b). This, however, does not mean that these discourses would not circulate among sections of the Indian population too.

Indian people also participate in the very same discourses as those of the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi and Goa. Paolo Favero has argued that young middle-class<sup>14</sup> men in Delhi celebrate an image of “an essentialised and idealised ‘India,’ symbolised by the village, traditional life-styles and spiritual heritage” (Favero 2005: 71). They thus share a discourse of the magnificence of Indian spirituality and the simplicity of its culture (Favero 2005: 87). Favero also points out that contemporary Indian companies use this image in their marketing strategies for domestic consumers (Favero 2005: 90). According to Favero, the Western representations of India have thus become useful instruments in India’s self-representation (Favero 2005: 76). However, the urban middle classes do not aim to “freeze” India in its authentic past like the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi do. Rather, the past is used in a flexible way within modernity and with a view towards the future (Favero 2005: 89). Favero’s Indian research subjects, for example, held the view that tradition makes India strong in the globalising world (Favero 2005: 241), whereas the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi did not share such a global approach. The fact that sections of the Indian urban middle class share the discourse of authentic and spiritual India with the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi shows how discourses about India circulate. It is, however, worthy of note that the celebration of particular discourses is not merely the result of the efforts of individuals. One should not ignore the fact that the right-wing nationalistic Hindu movement has become powerful in India and is actively promoting its own view of the

14 The concept of middle class is problematic in the Indian context but it is usually used to refer to the relatively well-off urban population that has a university education and sufficient financial means to participate in the current consumer culture (see Brosius 2010).

"authentic" Hindu India. Moreover, in addition to its "Incredible India" campaign, which is targeted at international tourists, the Indian Ministry of Tourism has a campaign entitled "Discover Yourself," which is targeted at domestic tourists. In fact, Bandyopadhyay, Morais and Chick (2008) argue that heritage tourism is an integral part of national identity building in India and that a significant part of this is the celebration of India's glorious past, often with reference to the Hindu understanding of it. In other words, there are many actors in the game.

The discourse of the "authentic" and "spiritual" India has its origins in the colonial era and the anti-colonial struggle. The discourse of freedom and hedonism that the lifestyle migrants in Goa celebrate emerged much later, as part of the hippie movement. It is, however, currently shared by sections of the Indian population as well. Goa has become a popular holiday destination for relatively well-off young people from metropolitan Indian cities, and the Bollywood elite likes to go to Goa to party. Tourism in Goa has a long history, partly related to the fact that, unlike other Indian states, it was a Portuguese colony, and therefore has not only different kinds of architectural heritage (because of the Catholic influence) but also a different kind of lifestyle (the most recognised sign of which is permission to consume alcohol) (Trichur 2007; Gupta 2009).

Saldanha, writing on the trance scene in Goa, claims that the "domestic tourists didn't have the cultural or economic resources to join in" the trance parties (Saldanha 2007: 6). However, he conducted his fieldwork more than ten years ago and it seems to me that an increasing number of Indian young people do now possess the cultural and economic capital to join the trance scene. Sometimes they attend the same parties as the Westerners, and at other times they have their own parties, but in both situations these young Indian tourists celebrate a similar discourse of freedom, leisure and enjoyment as the lifestyle migrants in Goa do. In fact, many of the lifestyle migrants working in the Goan markets sell their products also to Indian tourists who eagerly participate in the culture of expressive outfits, trance parties and drugs. For them too, Goa is a "freakland of freedom" where one can escape the pressures of life in one's place of origin. Therefore, although the lifestyle migrants keep a social distance from Indian people, some Indians share their discourse about Goa (and Varanasi).

## CONCLUSION

This article has shown that there are a number of discourses that describe "Incredible India" and that when lifestyle migrants search for that something that Indians "have got," they can be referring to very different things; in Varanasi they mean authenticity and spirituality, whereas in Goa they mean freedom and pleasure. In these discourses, orientalism and postmodern individualism

become entangled and the discourses circulate and intersect in various ways. Being a lifestyle migrant in “Incredible India” means different things in different locations, but the people nevertheless share a love for “India” and a willingness to repeatedly return.

In this article, I have also shown that the discourses about India celebrated by the lifestyle migrants are shared by sections of the Indian population. First, the discourse of an exotic authenticity is persistent but has different manifestations and meanings in different contexts. Secondly, I have argued that the discourse of freedom that lifestyle migrants in Goa celebrate is shared by sections of the urban Indian youth. Goa has often been presented and represented as a place of the celebration of a global trance culture (D’Andrea 2007; Saldanha 2007; St. John 2011) but it is important to keep in mind that the trance culture has Indian participants too, and for them Goa is a “freakland of freedom” in a similar way as it is for lifestyle migrants. Therefore, although lifestyle migrants keep a social distance from local populations and seem to create their own understandings of Incredible India, Indians are not necessarily passive viewers but active participants in the same discourses with their own interpretations. Incredible India is not only a state tourism policy; it has many faces, of which the cases of Varanasi and Goa are two important ones.

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