

Saroj Kumar Dhal

FESTIVALS AND REUNIONS; WORDS AND WORLDS OF INDIAN MIGRANTS OF KYOTO CITY

The objective of this paper is to explore the importance of family and festivals for the Indian migrants in Kyoto City of Japan. Migration has shown the path of economic progress but at the cost of social and emotional ties of family members and friends. Further, there are socio-cultural reasons of Indian Festivals, which attract those migrants towards home to spend a quality time with friends and family members. Most of the Indian festivals are usually celebrated in family. Real joy and happiness of a festival can be realized in family life. Of course it costs a lot to visit the native land from abroad but at the same time the outcome is immeasurable. A son's meeting with his mother, a husband's meeting with his wife or a father meets with his children are beyond all cost of life. For a migrant son or a migrant husband or a migrant father, the experiences of migration and separation may not be explained with these mere words. It can be realized when they come to meet their near one during festivals. Broadly sociological concepts of diaspora and migration have been used to analyse the data.

We know that people are on the move since ages, but there is only very little detailed ethnography concerning the conditions, contexts, the process, the effects and affects of these on individuals as well as family lives or social life in general is available. The early view among economists was that rural-urban migration in developing countries was a desirable process as an integral part of economic development (Banerjee, 1998). Harris and Todaro's (1970) neo-classical model regards migration as a product of rational economic decision-making. The migrant makes a rational and free choice to improve his economic condition by seeking more favorable employment conditions. Recent analyses (Gardner, 1995) of the trends in the South Asian region have revealed that migration generally results from the decision-making of individuals and collectivities, such as families or households. Needless to mention, the primary impetus to migrate for employment is economic motive.

Also there is a body of work on international migration (Gulf Migrants, Diaspora studies¹), which focuses on prospects (remittances), problems and

SAROJ KUMAR DHAL, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, *E-mail: sarojdse@gmail.com*

policy related issues of Indian migrants working or settled in Gulf and other countries. The work like Osella, Filippo and Katy Gardner's (2004) on Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia has given a detailed picture of migration from and within South Asia especially in the context of historical as well as cultural and economic conditions. It is here, at the interstices of practice and representation of popular and institutional narratives, that they find an intimate relation between aspirations to 'modernity' and migration as a vehicle for their possible realization.

In light of the above, the paper attempts to deal with Indian migrants to Kyoto and analysis has been made through cases. Just like countless Indians who work in different cities of world far away from home (native place), Rajesh seldom calls home, and he visits even less. Rajesh booked an air ticket two months earlier for *Diwali* (festival of light), so he could enjoy the famous North Indian festival at home. He reminds his childhood time in that festival period, which was full of joy with crackers and other tasty foods made him homesick. "I woke up one day with my pillow wet with tears, so I decided to go home" says Rajesh, 30, who works as a cook in an Indian Restaurant of Kyoto city. He has been away from home for nine years, and at one time, he even lost contact with his family for about two years. "Distance makes strangers of each other, but ultimately, home still calls out to people like me," Rajesh says. It's getting harder and harder to keep in close contact, and the ties that bind are being frayed by changing circumstances. Many children no longer live with their parents after marriage, and more and more fresh graduates are leaving home to work in cities where there are better job opportunities. And as they settle, they soon cultivate completely new circles of friends and support system away from the older networks at home. That's why it is so important to re-establish the home bonds, and social study and folk exports agree that festivals are the perfect medium of opportunity to freshen these ties. Households are also important in international migration. The overseas Indians maintain contact with their places of origin and send large sums of money to home for the maintenance of the family. Unlike the effects of migration on social structure through changes in demography, size and composition, the link between migration and social change is not mechanical and immediate. Migration is undertaken by people with the hope of raising the resources necessary for improving their and their kinsfolk's standard of living on a sustainable basis. (Zacharia, *et al.*, 2003).

During the festivals like *Durgapuja* and *Diwali*, when people think of their homes, parents and other family members, relatives and friends and want to reconnect, even if it's only a phone call, sms, email or a video chat, no matter how far away they live from home, or how the family structure has evolved. More often than not, family ties suffer slow erosion rather than a sudden break. For example, Rajesh left home when he was just 21. He started working in a Thai Restaurant in Delhi for two years, and then he moved to

Bangkok by the help of a Thai Business man and worked there for another two and half years. Then he moved to Kyoto in 2005 as a cook by the help of same business man owned the restaurant business in different cities of different countries across world. Initially Rajesh would phone his family twice a month, but the calls became less and less frequent as their worlds grew further apart and there was nothing in common to talk about anymore. "I became impatient with my mother's ramblings about trivia things. The longer I was away, the more my world became different from theirs." It was a hard life in Bangkok and he had to eke out a living from lot of odd moments of his life. But even when he was in trouble, he did not turn to his family for help. 'I depended on myself to solve my problems. My family could not help because they did not know what was happening in my world. They had nothing to do with it,' Rajesh says.

Deepak, a new arrival in Kyoto, shares the same feelings of being disconnected, which he blames on a heavy workload in Dubai city, where he worked in a restaurant for seven years. Deepak 25 comes from West Bengal and left home when he was 18. He says the younger workers these days are a lot more independent compared to past generations. "People used to take over their parents' job when the older generation retired. Now we plot our own paths, even exploring opportunities in new cities or countries," Deepak says. Another obstacle to a closer family network is when large extended families are split into smaller nuclear units. The close-knit families where several generations and different branches lived together under one roof are rare now. The concept of clan is played down these days and bigger families have disintegrated. The bonds of extended family, like uncle and nephew, are now very flimsy. The market economy has also exacted a toll. There is a conflict of interest as people get richer and lives get more complicated. Income didn't use to be that diverse. Lives used to simpler. They didn't compete and compare so much. But I feel a traditional time or festival time for reunion may trigger the urge to reconnect. Modernization has left its print on families and relationships in different contexts and conditions. But festivals are such occasions when we remind about family and home. And everyone gets a sense of wanting to go home. These occasions wake up our love, attachment and responsibility for the family. "I want to spend some quality time with my grandmother and other family members, when I will be at my home," says Rajesh. According to him, kinship is the most important part of life. *Chhat* of Bihar, *Durgapuja* of Bengal, *Holi* and *Diwali* of North, *Pongal* of South India etc. are some great festivals of India which having great significance of family union and reunion during celebrations. Festivals are meant for families not for individuals as I feel so. So we think more about families and homes before such festive seasons. People wait for festivals to visit their native places. It can be justified if we visit Airports and Railway stations just before such occasions. Indian Govt. plans for some special trains to avoid the huge jams. Indian festivals that purely advocate joy, happiness and reunion among the

family members. Mr. Sahoo, a research scholar of Kyoto University from Odisha, who has been here in Kyoto city since last three years and expresses in a sad voice that “ you have to forget and sacrifice festivals and families if you want to achieve something in today’s competitive world.” He reminds all his childhood memories of festivals and family lives but distance and circumstances has made him stronger enough to move beyond such nostalgic memories. Certainly he calls once at least once in a week and he sends regular emails to his school and college friends. He agrees that he gets a sense of visiting home during festivals but avoids because of constraining factors like time and money.

Traditions may have faded in the neon-lit cities but many customs are very much alive in the migrant’s heart and mind, even after long years of migration. Cities are the best place to work and earn but our native places are best place to enjoy the festivals and family life as Mr. Deepak feels. He knows he can’t earn that much money from his native land as he earns over here but we can’t compare the values of family life and festival occasion with money or with the materialistic world. Festivals rounds up sons and daughters working away who head home during these important festivals and trying to find out how these prodigals strengthen the ties that bind with lights and sweets of *Diwali* and visits to family and friends. Deepak believes *Durgapuja* is one of the most important festivals of West Bengal. All most all the cities and small places decorated with huge expenditures and that attracts all Bengali people to participate and enjoy from different cities of India and from other countries as well. Definitely migrants are transforming their lives and traditional culture to a great extent but at the same time they are unable to detach from the family life during festive seasons. One young textile engineer Mr. Ankit from Mumbai, whom I met at Kansai International Airport, Osaka (the nearest airport of Kyoto city), who says “I am born and brought up in Mumbai, staying with my parents so I never miss them nor miss any festive occasions. Yes I have seen many of my colleagues and friends they go on leave during festivals. I am quite lucky to be with my parents since my childhood.” He believes festivals are the right time to be together and his sister stays at Singapore, who visits Delhi once or twice in a year (her in law’s home) during either *Holi* or *Diwali* according to her husband’s suitable conditions. Hence the structure of families may change because of different reasons but the functions due to festivals may recollect and reunite family members with a strong sense of belongingness, feelings and emotions. Festivals are not only the mere occasions of reunions but also gives lot of spaces to share your sorrows, pains and happiness with your nearer and dearer ones.

Migrants are being re-defined as “heroes of development”. The key element in the new debate is the growth of migrant remittances (the money sent home by migrant workers). However, recent reports also emphasise on other potential benefits of migration, especially the broader role of migrant

diasporas in national development. The main emphasis has been on the rapid growth of remittances to less-developed countries (Ghosh, 2006; World Bank, 2006). An economist Kapur (2004) has pointed out, remittances have become a new “development mantra” with the belief that remittances can be channelled into economic investments that will overcome underdevelopment. Or to put it less positively, the idea is that some of the most exploited workers in the world can make up for the failure of mainstream development policies. It is useful to extend Kapur’s notion of a “new mantra” to include the whole range of benefits that migration is said to bring for development. Migrants also transfer home skills and attitudes—the social remittances—which supports development. Regardless of the various perspectives on the origin of labour migration, all contemporary scholars agree on the concept of social networks as a key factor sustaining it over time (Portes and Bach, 1985; Massey *et. al.*, 2002). Social networks link not only migrants with their kin and communities in the sending countries; they also help establish link between employers in receiving areas with migrants looking for an employment opportunity. These ties underlie the emergence of such phenomena as chain migration, long-distance referral systems to fill job vacancies, and the organisation of a dependable flow of remittances back to sending communities. At later stages, they are also the key factor in the consolidation of transnational organisations that endow migrant populations with increasing voice in the affairs of their localities and even countries of origin (Guarnizo *et. al.*, 2003; Goldring, 2002).

In the case of China, Murphy (2005) notes that migration has made major contributions to development, by accelerating the economic growth, building up cities and establishing rural-urban linkages. Remittances are used to finance a range of expenses, including food, health, housing, weddings, funerals, schooling, etc. Even if not spent directly for ‘productive uses’, such spending can have an overall positive impact at the household level by helping keep the resources aside for other productive uses. As already mentioned, Mr Ankit sends money to the family back in the village who now are able to afford many electric and electronic appliances, gadgets, and also better schooling for their children. Even as it does not reduce poverty directly, remittances are probably helping to sustain rural livelihoods by preventing people from sliding further into poverty which would have been the case if they had depended solely on a deteriorating agricultural base. An instance from Vietnam illustrates this powerfully. A recent synthesis of a number of studies shows that remittances have played a critical role in supporting rural households. The important role of remittances in repaying debts and providing investments in human capital through supporting educational and health expenses was documented. Other researches in Vietnam have also shown that a vast majority of migrants benefit economically from their movement outside. Murphy’s (2005) research in China found that remittances have an important effect on measured poverty rates of both the migrants themselves and the household members left behind. The evidences from South Asia give a mixed insight, but there

appears to be a growing evidence of the poverty reducing effects of migration. For example, a recent survey by Dayal and Karan (2003) conducted in 12 villages in the poor state of Jharkhand found that 98 per cent of the migrants reported an improvement in their lives because of migration. Migrant households had a better diet and spent on an average 15 per cent more on food than non-migrating households. In Bangladesh, it was found from a study by Ali (1981) that the extent of poverty was much lower (around 30 per cent) in households having migrant members than in non-migrant households (around 60 per cent). In a study of garment manufacturing unit workers, it was concluded that migration had pulled people out of poverty. In Cambodia, a survey conducted by Godfrey (*et al.*, 2001), the Cambodia Development Research Institute (CDRI) in 2000 found that more than half of the households with long-range migrants were able to meet the short-term food and farming requirements. Almost all short-range migrants were able to save money. They also reported development of skills, such as construction, hairdressing, petty trading, tailoring and other vocations.

Though many authors maintain that migration is mainly a distress phenomenon—Reddy (1990), Rao (1994), Prasad and Rao (1996)—they rarely examine the counterfactual; i.e. what prospects exist within the village and what would these people have done in the absence of the opportunity to migrate? But in the case of HAL migrants, their migration is an aspiration as their development is not measured in terms of the basic needs or amenities which they already had. Rather it is in the form of their children's education/career, better housing structure in the village and other social and psychological components of development. This chapter analyses the cultural, political, social and day-to-day expressions of migrants in a city. Individual migration is usually only one aspect of the broader household and family strategies of survival. It is controlled by the expectations of other members of the household and the migrant's own expectations, including the lifestyle he or she is accustomed to. Whether a migrant stays or moves on, is thus not only a question of the matching of the skills he or she has and what is required in a particular labour market, but also a question of being able to settle down and acquire a desirable way of life. Also it helps provide conducive space (sound infrastructural facilities) for the family members and relatives of the migrants left behind in the village, which is an important aspect of rural development.

What is the purpose of migration for an individual? People migrate not just to earn money; they migrate with lots of ambitions, aspirations and dreams. People migrate with a purpose and with the hope of getting satisfaction. If migration does not provide this, then migration will lose its real value of mobility both in spatial and social sense. If the purpose of migration is achieved then there is hardly any feeling of alienation in the new place. But if the goals of migration are not achieved, the migrant status will

haunt the individual for a long period. Here the migration story of Rajuddin is achieved to a great extent.

The story of Rajuddin, 45 is different from others. The 5th class pass out Rural Bengali Muslim left his village when he was 14. But he has been here in Kyoto, Japan since last twenty years. He is no more Rajuddin, now he is famous as Raju in Kyoto city. He runs around twelve restaurants (named as Asian Kitchen/Raju Resturant) in different parts of Kyoto city. He is no more a poor Indian Migrant rather he has been able to give work to other poor uneducated young Muslim fellow villagers in his restaurants. Raju has already got Japanese residency. He is now having dual citizenship as well two families, one in India (native village of West Bengal) and another in Kyoto. One daughter aged 15 years studying in the Village School and here he has two sons (Raju, 8 and Salman, 4) from a Japanese (by Buddhism in religion) wife. He has been part of two different worlds and successfully managing that. Now he is a man of millions, a flat in Delhi, a three storey building in Kyoto and huge building in his native village of Bengal. An ordinary man became extraordinary because he dared to confront extra ordinary risks. Yes life was never been easy in his long journeys. He has paid lot for this great achievement. His early period of migration was not rosy rather too struggling. After going through lot of twists and turns, he decided to start restaurant business in Kyoto city. For him migration has already become a past story now he is Japanese by citizenship but he has not been detached from his past life nor from his native family. He sends lot of money for his wife and daughter and other family members and also he doesn't forget to visit his native place once/twice during the festivals like Eid or any other family occasions (marriage) in every year. As he says he enjoys his economic life here in Japan but he enjoys his Family life in India (native place). He is not repenting over anything in his life except for some educational qualification otherwise he says he is happy for everything whatever he has today in his life. He took every risk to overcome his poverty and could able to give better support to all his family members. Yes every week he talks to wife and daughter and feels better, thanks to mobile technology. During the last *Eid*, he visited his native place and bought a computer for his daughter. He says, he will support everything for his daughter's education so that she would be independent in her life. Now he understands the value of education, his story could be different, if he was an educated migrant. According to him he doesn't enjoy the festival like *Eid* in Japan as in India. For him *Eid* is a great time to meet his wife, daughter and other family members, relatives, friends which is beyond the mere enjoyment of the festival. He waits for the *Eid* every year, so that he could meet them and enjoy the festival. When he reminds his childhood, he becomes so emotional but those things he avoids/forgets consciously. Now he is Raju, the masters of Asian Kitchen and he does want to go back and will move on.....

Migration is shaped, facilitated and maintained in multiple ways by the social ties in which migrants remain or become embedded (Massey, *et. al.*

1998). The impact of social networks on the lives of the migrants and those connected to them is now abundantly seen across different regions. For instance Levitt (2001) shows how Dominicans' by continuing ties with their native village create a channel not only for the flow of material resources but also for 'social remittances' transparent in the circulation of values and norms that dramatically change the social organisation of life at home.

Adnaan, 25 one of the cook of Raju's Kitchen, high school pass from the same village where Raju belongs to, came for the first time with Raju two years back. He has not been able to visit his home since he came here. Certainly it was a difficult time for him, because he left his home first time and that to for a long distance. He does miss his mother but no option to move. He has already sent around fifty thousand for his family within two years. Rest money he has saved in his own account. He is not that much happy here as others. After two/three years he will be back to India and work there, so that he could visit his home regularly. He says "money is not everything in life, my mother, my family is more important. I don't want much money to have a life without my family members. So I will do any work anywhere in India." Yes he has missed all celebration in these two years. This time during *Eid* festival he wanted to go home but Raju (the owner/master) didn't allow him due to scarcity of employee. Any way he will go home and marry there and settle there in India and never come back here. For Adnan, migration has least value, when he compares his family life, especially life with his mother. He reminds, his mother' call before every time he feels hungry but here life is only to earn money.

Despite geographical separation, sentimental and affectional ties between family members are not weakened and the close bonds between the different components of the family are reflected in regular transfer of resources and frequent visits. The migrant also retains ownership rights in any property owned by the family in the rural area, as told by above respondents. In other words, family integration is maintained by ways other than by forming domestic group multcentred families and interactions between the components.

NOTE

1. For a comprehensive review of the literature on South Asian Diaspora generally see Sandhya Shukla (2001) and Roger Ballard (1994).

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