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A View of Europe: Perspectives from Indian Immigrants

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Abstract

This EuroBroadMap working paper explores perspectives from Indian immigrants on Europe. Based on surveys realised in 2010 in India, Italy and France, this paper highlights migrants representations before and after their migratory moves. Relations with history (former colonial links), cultural representations (movies, literature) and migration policies are also explored.

Key-words: India, Europe, representations, migrants, migration policies

Ce working paper issu du projet EurobroadMap explore les perspectives des migrants indiens relatives à l'Europe. Basé sur des enquêtes réalisées en 2010 en Inde, en France et en Italie, ce papier met en évidence les représentations des migrants avant et après leur migration. Les relations avec l'histoire (liens coloniaux passés), les représentations culturelles (cinéma, littérature) et les politiques migratoires sont également explorées.

Mots clés : Inde, Europe, représentations, migrants, politique migratoire

Cover: Image from the movie *Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayenga*.

Introduction

In this paper we look at patterns of migration from India to Europe. In this regard it should be borne in mind that it is difficult to talk about external migration from India in a singular framework as the migrant population is heterogeneous in terms of age, gender and economic positions. This paper tries to view the different stories of migrants in a broad framework to understand what actually makes an Indian immigrant native to its context irrespective of individual differences. One important way to examine the specificity of contexts is through the policies that India has towards expatriates. Since independence there have been laws that have tried to address the problems of immigrants. The Emigration act of 1982 can be mentioned here as it deals with micro issues of emigrants in terms of grievances of both unskilled and skilled labour. The Indian diaspora is of considerable size and it has become an important diasporic community in Europe and United States.

The High Level Committee on the Indian Diasporas in its foreword, writes in December 2001, that ‘the population of Indian Diaspora is estimated to be around 20 million. However, country-wise estimates provided in the same report submitted to the Ministry of External Affairs (2001), New Delhi, gives the approximate numbers of Indians settled throughout the world in 13 countries as around 16.9 million; of which 51 per cent belong to the people of Indian origins. There are about 10.000 Indians or more in 48 countries and more than half a million persons of Indian descent in 11 countries’¹

Two important kinds of migratory trends have been noticed over the years. Largely skilled and professional immigrants are seen to move to countries such as USA, UK, Canada, and Australia as permanent migrants which has been happening since 1950s. Unskilled and semi skilled persons are seen to migrate to the Middle East on temporary contracts especially after the oil price hike of 1970s. Economic push factor has been crucial element of the migration of Indian to other countries. The greatest challenge facing India is creating enough jobs for its burgeoning population. India’s unemployed have never been properly estimated, but they could be a total of about 100 million². The economic situation of India can be one of factors leading to transnational migration. There can be other factors too like social mobility and the concern for personal growth that also influence the decision to migrate.

The Indian diaspora, a viable population, is seen by the Indian state in a variety of ways. It is here that the heterogeneity of the immigrant population comes to terms with the different state policies and agenda. The class background of the immigrant is an important denominator in the policies

¹<http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/meetings/migrationaug2003/India.pdf>

²<http://www.globalization101.org>

of the government and visibility in public spaces. The *Pravashi Bhartiya Diwas* (The Indian Emigrant Day) which is an elaborate affair celebrated every year in January involving major political dignitaries in India including the Prime Minister shows the attitude of the Indian state towards the diasporic population. The official web site highlights the importance of the programme to honour individuals of exceptional merit with the prestigious *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award*. There is a sense in which this interactive platform is allowed when the prospective member has the capacity to make an enormous contribution of economic and social value to India. The unskilled labour, the deportees, the illegal immigrants, all seem to lack a voice in the public discourse. The policies of the government do become important in understanding the link between the reproduction of certain kinds of labour category and the merits of doing so. More and more the Indian government has been trying to capture the affluent diasporic population settled in Europe and the United States as they make a substantial contribution to the Indian economy through remuneration. The slackened attitude of the Indian government towards different categories came through our interviews as well.

Rajpal working in a diary farm in a small town in Italy spoke about the discriminatory treatment of the Indian government. During the time when many of the Indian immigrants were held hostage in the gulf, there was limited intervention from the Indian government. He said that it was very sad to see the government's laid-back attitude towards the immigrant issue. The government did not see itself as accountable. He is of the opinion that they are not hopeful about their own situation in Italy vis-à-vis the Indian government who are less likely to take any proactive measures for them. They are almost like a forgotten population.

The views reflected by Rajpal stand in contrast to the way in which the Indian government has been treating successful members of the diaspora abroad.

Methodology

This paper is based on fieldwork which was conducted in three locations, New Delhi in India, Italy and France in 2010. Roughly about twenty one potential migrants and immigrants already settled in Europe were interviewed in visa centres, university campuses, language schools in New Delhi in February 2010. About nineteen immigrants were interviewed in four small towns and one larger city in Italy in May 2010. And a few more were interviewed in Italy and France in October 2010. The reason for having different locations for our fieldwork is because the three places allowed us to have a nuanced understanding of the immigrant situation of Indians in Europe.

New Delhi emerged as a natural choice as it being the national capital,

having the different diplomatic offices, made the potential immigrants flock to visa centres to create and validate their papers like passport and visa documents required for migration. This allowed us the possibility to know the prospective immigrant in greater detail. Who are the people that are trying to migrate to Europe, what kind of aspirations do they have, what are the images of Europe that they carry in their minds, what are their socio-economic backgrounds? These were some of the important questions that got interesting responses when put across to the potential immigrants in different locations in New Delhi.

Italy was chosen for fieldwork for two reasons. We were able to establish a good contact in Milan who introduced us to a range of Indian immigrants settled in Italy. Secondly, there has been a large wave of Indian immigrants to Italy from the 1970s onwards. This emerged through our field data as there have been shifts in the migration patterns of Indians to Italy. Many of the first generation migrants had come to Italy on a tourist visa and stayed on initially taking up jobs in circuses and other petty forms of employment. In recent times however the immigrant situation has been seen to worsen due to the tightening of immigrant policies and the reduction of jobs. The large number of Indian immigrants in the Lombardy region of northern Italy and the possibility of meeting and interviewing many Indian dairy farmers, factory workers, and business men in their homes, work places, and temples, constructed it as a productive research site. The choice of France came as an extension of understanding the immigrant situation in a neighbouring country which also had a considerable section of Indian immigrants.

The interviews were largely semi structured. We had an interview schedule but there were times when we could not evoke responses on particular questions mostly about the immigrants' knowledge about other countries in Europe. And at times we could get an elaborate account on how they got their jobs and their journey to a new country. The choice of questions answered and detailed descriptions of certain events of their lives gave us insights into the crucial thresholds that they encountered in a new country which strongly emphasized the stories of resilience based on the desire of wanting to survive in new territory.

The interviewees were of a broad range. There were students, employed, self employed and the unemployed³. The impact of the interviewer on the respondent was an interesting part of the fieldwork. The presence of two Indian women talking to the members of different communities, chief among them being the Punjabi community, brought out the elements of familiarity and comfort of meeting someone from the homeland. The power equation of the interviewer and interviewee could not be viewed in strict terms. While there were instances when our presence was interpreted as of those who could influence the current status of the immigrant, in many other cases, we

³A detailed table of the interviewees is given at the end of the paper.

were spoken to as curious researchers. They seemed happy to have someone to listen to their tales. Overall however our position as researchers was underplayed as most of the times the respondents were seen to talk about their lives without thinking about the consequences or implications of such information.

Some of the difficulties of the qualitative method were that there was no way to validate the information. There was also the disadvantage of not being able to give equal weightage to different questions which at times meant that the interviewer was at the mercy of the interviewee as it depended on them on what questions to answer or not. A long winding interview brings about a flexibility which can make one lose out on specific data. Sometimes there was a difficulty in getting answers to particular questions and we were struck by the stubbornness of the respondent who would not give us answers even when we kept coming back to those questions. All interviews were conducted with the consent of the respondent and they were made aware that the fieldwork was a research initiative. Language was not a barrier as the respondents were mainly from the northern belt of India speaking Hindi or Punjabi which were familiar languages to us.

1 Memory, History and Culture

Europe is a regular reference which is seen to be used in mundane contexts in India. One of the important ways in which this understanding can be mapped is through the colonial context. Parts of India have been Portuguese and French colonies and India as a whole was a British colony for a long time. The former two colonizing countries coming to India earlier than the British left an important impact on the cultural and physical landscape of those regions which were colonized. The union territory of Puducherry which was an erstwhile French colony exhibits the presence of the foreign culture in a number of ways, in material forms of architecture, language of the people and shaping the aspiration of the locals of seeing France as a desirable destination to migrate to. This influence strikingly is present strongly even today. The story of England is different altogether. Coming to trade with India under the British East India Company in 1600, the British colony spread its control far and wide over the country, having a full-fledged empire by the middle of the nineteenth century. The role of the British Empire in India cannot be seen as merely as a historical influence passed down through hereditary sources of knowledge or textbooks but its presence is palpable in the legal system, in communication and also through the proliferation of English which is one of the official languages in India. If we are to trace the representations of Europe through objects then it can be seen through the kind of objects that are static like architecture, codes of ethics in government offices or through objects of reproduction like school textbooks and

media. The British architecture is very prominent in different places in India including the national capital and there are residential houses, offices which are from British times and codes of conduct particularly in the law courts have the resonance of colonial customs. These aspects can be overlooked by people who are not interested in the shape of buildings or the source of habitual and customary practices. But with the other kinds of objects like textbooks and media images there is more of a systemic reproduction of images about Europe in general and England in particular. This cannot be seen simplistically as hegemony as even in these mediums there is a circulation of multiple images about Europe. For instance the history books especially in the school level will have a more absolute understanding of the relationship between India and the colonizing powers. The narratives of the freedom struggle, the chronology of events and narratives of exploitation of the natives brings out a vibrant image of a powerful foreign power which had illegitimately gained control over the nation. But the penetrative colonial power can be seen in another way in geography books or the course of literature where Europe emerges as a continent with beautiful physical landscapes and a different culture, often shown as a different and somewhat superior culture. The poetry of Wordsworth and Blake amongst others provides a picture of Europe that is less political and more sensory. The varied images can be seen through the aspects of institutionalised representation and reproduction of a hybrid Europe.

Some of the case studies will bring out this element of the textbooks having an influence on building impressions of potential immigrants about Europe. It also brings to light the fact that the variety of textbooks are also dependent on the subject of study and the medium of instruction. The students in language school were able to read about European culture in the native languages of French, English, Spanish or German. Textbooks of certain kinds are therefore accessible only to a particular educated class of people who can develop a strong image of Europe based on them.

Tanisha a student of BA (final year) in French language in Delhi University has been studying a lot about Europe during the course of her BA programme. Literary sources, such as Baudelaire and Maupassant, have been able to give her an outline about the everyday lives of the people in France. She wants to do her higher studies from any University in France. She feels that it will be extremely useful if she does her Ph.D from France as it would allow her to have a direct contact with the people about whom she has been studying for some time now. She feels that her grasp over the language will improve if she gets a chance to study in France. Her view about France is already becoming critical as she has been reading about the country from different sources. In her school text book, France was summarised by the words 'liberty, fraternity and equality, it was seen as an ideal country where these values were retained'. Now Tanisha after reading articles about

the present day situation in France, feels that many of these values do not practically exist; French policies towards the immigrants are extremely harsh. Immigrants do not have rights and they are often denied jobs, they are run out of money and they end up becoming slaves in the country. Tanisha is aware about the political situation and the unfair treatment meted out to the immigrants, she therefore wants to finish her studies and work in India.

Another respondent Megha was aware about the political situation in France through newspaper articles and journals. She was in favour of the principle that in France religion was kept out of the public domain, and therefore the ban on the veil in the public sphere is justified. Megha felt that immigrant policy against the expatriates was harsh. These young women have a much more informed view about France, it is seen as a place of opportunity and completion of higher studies there will add an immense boost to their career. Simultaneously however there is much more critical awareness about the country through literary and other sources.

Rahul Upadhyay is a Nepali national who has grown up in the north eastern part of India was educated at a prestigious school St. Edmund's in Shillong. He completed his graduation from Assam, and went on to join Hyderabad Central University to pursue a Masters degree in English. His father retired as a doctor in a tea company and he was posted in Assam and Bengal. Rahul started working straight after completing his postgraduate degree. While doing his M.Phil from Delhi University, he taught in some colleges in Delhi University. Thereafter, he got an opportunity to work with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and is now based in the UK for the past two years. For Rahul, the urge to go a foreign country was not to earn money or to move up the professional ladder. In fact, he wanted to explore and see for himself the life worlds that have been opened up to him through textbooks and novels. The US came across to him as a country with a single culture. Being a literature student, Europe has shaped in his imagination as a spectrum of 'rich history, daunting architecture, enduring literature and evolving art'. The authors that he has read from Camus to Kafka to Wordsworth, the films of Ingmar Bergman have all built up a visual and ideational collage in his mind. He said 'Bergman has this beautiful way of using dark characters that shows the contrasting side of individuals, his characters would display different roles, you would get to see glimpses of European life and somewhere the banality of existence. If all the characters are put together it is like a collage of Europe, there is a difference you see when you are actually there though, the visual spectacle is not as dynamic as the real Europe is so dynamic and diverse'. He always wanted to experience and soak in this visual spectacle. Rahul feels that there is so much to explore from architecture to food to music.

The data collected amongst college students in India indicates the varied images that the students had of Europe. While the main cities like Paris and

London were seen as coveted places where the students would love to stay in the near future, Europe was also as a whole perceived as imperialistic and a continent rampaged by war. Overall the image of Europe as a beautiful, clean and rich continent is seen to be present in the imagination of the less educated potential immigrant and the local population in general in India.

Movies have been an important medium bringing about a heterogeneous image of Europe. Old Hindi movies like *Purav Pachim* (East West) had a very fixed understanding of Europe in contrast to the Orient which is seen to be different in culture, norms and values. There was a patriotic undertone which in a way discarded anything that was foreign in these movies. In recent times, Hindi movies have been more experimental and we see different depictions of Europe and many a times the protagonists are based in European cities, the favourite among them being London. In the course of our interviews the popular imagination about Europe did come out through movies. One or two of our respondents mentioned cult movies like *Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayenga* (*The lover will take away his bride*) giving them initial impressions about Europe, the most striking amongst them being the physical landscape of Europe like the snow capped mountains of Switzerland.

When we talk about media images, there is a parallel context that has to be considered in the case of the immigrants. In many of our interviews we found that once immigrants have settled in Europe, the electronic media especially is not used by them to acquire knowledge about the host country as much as it is used to be updated about happenings in the homeland. Many of the Indian school girls interviewed in a small town in Italy were found to watch popular Hindi soaps and serials on Indian television channels every day and they are as much a part of the pan Indian phenomenon of creating a certain kind of ideology of daily soaps as the viewers based in every nook and corner of India. The majority of the respondents were seen to watch Indian Soap Operas and apart from a few who watched a few American sitcoms, they were not particularly interested in the foreign media.

The opinion of Europe acquired from different sources before movement can be juxtaposed with the shift in the emphasis in host countries to create the replication of mostly the traditional and cultural contexts of the homeland. This can indicate the process of mentally preparing oneself for an unknown place and then filling the void of the homeland by recreating it in a new country. In the cases of our respondents this was largely true. They lived in an insulated universe in terms of having very more or less closed private spheres in the foreign world. So in a way the movement becomes prominently only a physical one as there are attempts made by immigrants to recreate the customs, symbols and norms they have left behind in their homeland. This disturbs the notion of migration as a journey to new frontiers as for many of the immigrants, migration was for economic reasons alone and contact with the social world in the foreign world was kept to the

minimum.

If we are to understand the need to migrate in the Indian context then it could not be understood through an immediate situation of unrest or historical events like war or colonization as much as it can be viewed as a decision made through the networks of family and friends. In other words, in India migration at different levels either with regards to developing aspirations to migrate, the journey and the settlement are intricately linked to the ties of family, community, village and even the nation. Different respondents emphasized on the aspect of networks in preparing for the journey, finding their first jobs or asking for help in a foreign country.

Ranvir from Rajasthan in India mentions about the links of village and neighbouring villages that help to smuggle illegal immigrants outside India on a tourist visa. He was talking about the exorbitant rates these agents charge as they were few people who could help a potential migrant to go through the tedious process of acquiring papers especially difficult for a poor 'gullible' villager. The neighbouring village has many of these agents colloquially known as 'kaburtar wallas' who informally help in the passage for a large sum of money. In talking about the influence of networks he was telling us that in many instances the need to migrate arises in the first place as many of the return migrant flaunt their assets in the village reaffirming the notion of Europe as a land of golden opportunities.

The importance of ties in charting out the path of migration is powerfully brought out through the figure of the 'social worker'. In our fieldwork we met a person from Punjab who calls himself a 'social worker' who in his nature of work can be categorized as an informal agent. He helps out new Indian immigrants with their legal papers such as documents pertaining to residence; he acts as a mediator between the immigrant and the Italian authorities like the *Questera*. Although there is a self fashioning of seeing his job as philanthropist, brokering is the prime source through which he earns his livelihood and prominence amongst the locals and Italian officers. Vikram seemed like a resourceful person and his prominence as a 'social worker' came about through the already existing system as a result of which he is approached by new migrants to sort out their problems in a new land. It is difficult to build a causal relationship between networks and the dependence of immigrants on them both before the journey and after arrival based on the field data.

Our research shows the comfort that the immigrants have shown when they live amongst members of their own community; meet the community in temples and *gurudwaras* mostly over the weekend and when they know they have someone from the community who can help them when they are in trouble. There is a psychological bind that can be seen between the trust developed by the immigrant for fellow countrymen in a new land. At some level this relationship also has an element of mystification which is reflected

through the figure of the ‘social worker’ as he or she also charges money for helping the new arrivals. They may also act as a block to the immigrant by knowing the workings of the system as the dependence is based on the simple dependence of not knowing the foreign tongue.

2 Europe as a possibility of access to modernization & globalization

The examination of Europe as a gateway to modernization is not viewed in a simplistic way by the interviewed Indian immigrants. Although there was the overarching belief that Europe was the land of opportunity and that was the reason why a large proportion of the respondents immigrated in the first place, the lifestyle of Europe was not unequivocally seen as progressive and modern. In fact of the many of the customs in Europe, such as the free mixing between the sexes, the lack of respect for elders and a lack of faith in religion, were seen by many of the interviewees both old and young, as regressive.

There was however a different understanding of the social structure like institutions and work places which were seen to be better organized than in India. Dignity of labour, less corruption and an efficient administration especially in the field of health and education in Europe gave a stronger image of a Europe as ‘modern’ and developed. The appreciation of the government offices and civic consciousness are aspects that most of our respondents emphasised about Europe.

The opinions about the employment scene in Europe can indicate how Europe is perceived economically and in a futuristic way. For many of the respondents the hey-days of European development are over; they see a slackened economy and rampant unemployment. The immigrant situation is seen to be linked to the economy. Immigrants especially to Europe who were welcomed as cheap labour a decade ago are no longer as welcome. Stricter laws regarding immigrants are in place as a consequence of recent developments.

In the stories of those residing in Italy or France, Europe does not carry a very romantic image. There is a change in the perception of Europe before the journey and after migration. For some Europe is imagined as land of opportunity, wealth and prosperity but when they reach there, they are acquainted with new realities like their relatives treating them badly, difficulties in finding a job and day to day experiences of racism. Europe which is seen as clean and beautiful gets juxtaposed with the complicated policies of immigration, the rush to get the required papers to find a job, then papers for residential permits, permanent visa and citizenship status. For some, it can also be about dealing with unemployment and not being able to process

correct papers to find jobs.

The aspect of nostalgia can be seen through this gap between lived experience and an imagined Europe.

Rani (school girl, 17 years) was sad to leave her birth place, Punjab. She was missing her life in general in her homeland. She says 'When I left Punjab, I was crying and crying, my eyes were swollen, left the little cousins whom I knew since their birth and they played in my lap, left my school friends with whom I played. I felt kuch kho gaya hain, wapas nahi milna (something has lost, won't come back)'. She was quite overwhelmed by the images that keep coming back from her earlier phase of life spent in India.

Prerna (school student, 18 years) came to Italy when she was 13. She said that she missed the amount of freedom she enjoyed in Punjab. She says 'In India it is more free, khula khula (open), here you are made to stay inside the house'. There was a limited vigil in India as the parents were not scared but here since it is a new country so parents are extra concerned about safety.

Shreyasi Rana, (school student, 16 years) sees a difference in her life in the country of birth and that of residence in terms of the people and customs she is surrounded by. According to her, 'religion is different, here no grandfather and grandmother. Children don't respect their parents, abuse them at times.'

Harminder Kaur (school student, 17 years) saw the difference in her life in India and Italy only minimally. She felt that apart from the fact that dressing style has changed nothing much has changed in her life. Instead of salwar suit, she wears jeans more often now. 'Before coming to Europe I thought it was beautiful but now I feel things are almost the same.'

There are a few attributes that are appreciated but overall there is a very practical image of Europe. It is not viewed as an amazing place with golden opportunities but as a place where given the right kind of opportunities, one can move one up the success ladder fast. Individual hard work is acknowledged and has helped a few fortunate immigrants to be very successful in a foreign land. The discourse of modernization in Europe through the immigrants can be placed in a *Weberian* discourse of traditional rationality *vis-à-vis* rational legal action. India is seen as country that is dominated by the former set of values where still people rely on partisan ties like nepotism to get success. Europe's administration system was largely seen as being bounded by rules and therefore providing equal opportunity to all.

Europe is experienced by the respondents from the point of view of their own subject position. This aspect is interesting as the notion of place or larger social milieu affecting the construction of self can be problematized. The notion of micro communities within a larger social structure can be thought of in this regard. Europe has been spearheading the women's movement for long talking about women's empowerment and freedom. When we take the instance of the women immigrants, excepting a few, we get the

impression that the social worlds that these women inhabit in Europe are narrow and there are a lot of restrictions on their movement. This restriction is not direct in terms of some higher authority having surveillance on behavior at all times but the restrictions on the self come from processes of internalization. This is crucial as many of these women, mostly wives and young girls, were seen to enjoy much more freedom when they were in India. This may be due to the fact that there were stronger ties between women and networks and they could all venture out together added to the fact that the community was familiar and therefore a safe haven. Europe on the other hand becomes an uncharted terrain where the social as well as the physical organization of space is very different. This brings about a dynamic where the clutch of patriarchy becomes stronger even without the presence of the primary agents of oppression, such as other men, elders, community norms and officials. Many of the Indian housewives in Italy said that they liked to be inside the house. They do go out to shop, visit friends but not very frequently. They are especially not comfortable in being part of the host community or their social functions. The necessity to have the traditional cultures passed down to the next generation and the importance of maintaining it in a everyday way can be one of the reason for women in Indian households becoming more cautious about their movement and social life in general.

Irene Gedalof in her study highlights the general opinion that it is the women who in transnational households are responsible for reproducing the cultures of the community. There needs to be a caveat observed as the women specially housewives may not be well integrated in the host society and may have practical disadvantages like not knowing the language and be unaware of the customs of the new place. With the west, the engagement with the local culture for the immigrant wives may not be just a case of unfamiliarity but also that of uneasiness as many of the social customs like social drinking, dressing styles, practices of embodiment may be different from that they have grown up with. The lack of integration can have implications at different levels. The reason for not wanting to integrate cannot be uncritically viewed as voluntary. In the course of our interviews, a few of the male interviewees stated how they are careful in seeing that their daughters and wives never go against tradition or that the normative codes of conduct are observed especially in foreign contexts. So the restriction of women as housewives in a limited space can also be result of the control of their husbands or other members in the family. There is an element of violence in keeping the women embedded in the traditional systems of values which are much more rigid in a foreign land. Women find themselves being lonely and sometimes without agency. There are accounts where the wife has not got an opportunity to visit her hometown as she does not have the money.

A school girl Reema, 20 years of age in a small town in Italy said she hates

her father as he does not allow her mother to go back to India even though she is dying to go there. She said that her mother is lonely, she always stays at home. Her mother doesn't have any friends and she constantly misses her natal family in India. Reema is of the opinion that her father is quite well to do, they actually own a farm but she is still surprised that he does not give her mother money to travel to India. Reema said she often picks up fight with her father for treating her mother like that. She feels bad that her mother cannot do anything about it. She herself wants to become independent fast as she finds her father very oppressive. She says that her father doesn't allow her to talk to people over the phone or go out with friends. She is following all the rules now as she did not have much choice but, as soon as she gets a job, she will take her own decisions.

Many of the girls interviewed in the same school told us that how their parents were very strict about whom they are friends with and do not allow them to go out with their friends in the evening. Some of them mentioned that their parents have become stricter after coming to Italy and that they enjoyed more freedom when they were in India.

Women and young girls are seen to face greater restrictions in transnational contexts as their honour is seen to be threatened and it needs to be protected from some foreign influences and external threats. Men on the other hand in Europe were seen to face another kind of violence. The drudgery of manual work and inability to relate to a different culture creates a state of stagnancy when a person is not very hopeful about his own future. His only hope of mobility is seen through his children. He wants to see his child take up some professional job in 'an office' and not engage with manual work. These stories of despair and hope were seen in many narratives of the male respondents. These respondents were of a particular class background engaging in semi skilled work and not getting very well paid. The movement to a new land was due to financial instability in the homeland and there was no plan to return to India without some amount of money. There is a feeling of being trapped. The only respite sought by some from the monotonous life is to have some kind of social or community activity like going to the temples on the weekends or organizing social functions involving other Indians.

Narender Sharma, 36 years of age, a dairy farmer, found that the decision to migrate was probably not the best decision in his life. Such an opinion seems to be coming from his personal conditions. He had his family business in Punjab which flopped. So out of circumstantial reasons mainly to meet the financial crunch in the family after his father passed away, he moved to Italy. Working in a dairy farm changed him from an employer to an employee. His life style practices like being a teetotaler and vegetarian is one of the reasons for him maintaining a restrictive social life in Italy. The partial realization that there would not be any drastic improvement in his life under the present economic situation in Italy, plus the reason that he was not

part of the education system in Italy, made him yearn for an independent life in India. Narender Sharma describes his daily routine as getting up early morning and working from 4.00 am till about 8.00 am, then leaving his daughter to school. At 1.00 pm, he brings his daughter back, then he takes rest for a while and then work from 3.00 to 7.00 pm. He usually talks to relatives in India through internet phone. However he is also plays an active part in the public life participating in both religious and cultural functions to bring the Indian community to some prominence in Italy. He was actively involved with a cultural programme in recent times which was conducted with the collaboration with the mayor and councilor called Namaste Italia bringing out different cultural facets of India through dance, food, songs, etc. They called the famous maestro Ram Mohan Maharaj who gave a kathak recital. He is also involved with the activities of a Hindu temple where from time to time the devotees meet and conduct Puja (worship). Indulging in the social activities helps him find some meaning in an otherwise monotonous life.

In understanding Europe as a field of modernity, the aspect of social class becomes important. There are respondents who have been seen to perfectly fit in the lifestyle of Europe as they have similar social lives in India too. Those who have money and education are seen to make the most of the European life, having friends, staying in luxury apartments, sporting expensive accessories, and having social influence.

Manoj Khanna from Delhi is an interesting example of the way in which the class background determines the levels of integration with the host country. Given his education from a good university and his lifestyle of a contemporary urban youth, he apparently has the background of wealth and luxury to enjoy the benefits of Western life style and culture including the food, clothes, pub culture or enjoying western music. Manoj's father is a Chartered Accountant in Delhi and he is employed in Infosys which requires him to travel throughout Europe frequently. He has spent the maximum time in UK and France, six months and three months respectively. Manoj feels that for an average Indian it might be difficult to mix with the host population but he likes hanging out with the 'whites'. They go to the pub together and listen to the same kind of music, hip hop and RnB, there is bonding at different levels. Through his easy going relationship with the west, the culture and the people, he finds it effortless to integrate with the life there and does not explicitly experience a fragmentation in his selfhood as he is simply carrying over his life experience in India into his identity in the west.

Depending on the levels of integration which for the student in higher institutions of learning in Europe is much higher, they have a nuanced understanding of the lifestyles of Europe. The Indian students were seen to pick up on culture, political icons, objects of consumption and habits, to talk about the lifestyle practices in Europe.

Puja, a PhD student talking about the education in Italy, feels it is good

as most courses were in English. However she was a bit doubtful about the job scene: 'In terms of jobs, there would be problem to get one in Italy in the current economic situation'.

Dinesh, another student, felt that: 'People are friendly but language is different. As far as studies are concerned, there is not that much of a problem with regards to language or being in Italy. Italians have warned that bureaucracy is not that good in Italy'. He knew about Ferrari, Milan as the fashion capital but Italians told him 'we are under siege. Berlusconi controls media, filters information and is corrupt, if you don't have internet then you don't get all the news, the general opinion that floats around is adulterated and there is little truth in them'. He had also observed that Italian class mates want to go to other countries to study. Italians are not happy to stay in Italy as they think things are in a mess in their own country. He also rates Italy as average amongst other European countries, he is of the opinion that 'Berlusconi will die soon so then it will emerge. Most European countries are rooted to culture and language. 7 or 8 states were integrated to form Italy long ago, so differences exist, 25% of the revenue is from north region. Rome is for tourists. Milan is more sanitized. Nature tourism is good. One can see the Alps, in the parks where you see the sun set, nature is just there in front of you. Can't put billboards everywhere'.

Pankaj is of the opinion that political parties are ruled by Catholics in Italy. And so there is a stronger influence of an external body on governance and political decisions taken. He sees Italy as leading in fashion, architecture and design.

The question of European lifestyle and its correlation with modernity most explicitly expressed through art and architecture, can give us account what aspects of the self have to be reconciled and for whom. In many of the narratives, the journey required immigrants to do away with blatant expressions of their religion or differences to be part of European culture. In a couple of instances narrated by Sikhs respondents, they had to cut their long hair before the journey so that they do not look different. The importance placed on having an image which does not carry religious, linguistic, cultural differences is highlighted through these acts. The respondents, who cut their hair, tell us that they would grow it back once they find a footing in a new country. The fluidity of identity, moving in and out of identities, can bring about an interesting element to the narrative of the immigrant who negotiates between different parts of the self in a new country. The stories of negotiation cannot be fixed for all immigrants and may not be same in similar situations. For instance, the need for someone to forsake his Sikh identity like the turban can be linked to his class position. A person with a privileged background may be comfortable to publicly carry the signs of his own community and difference in Europe.

Europe therefore to be perceived and experienced as a gateway to moder-

nity is dependent on a number of factors which through our fieldwork relied on the social and economic backgrounds of the person, educational level, and exposure to European lifestyle in the homeland, and the extent to which the domestic sphere is closed in the transnational context.

3 Europe and its borders

An immigrant has an image of Europe and he has an image of the immigrant policies of Europe. In other words, an immigrant can have an objective understanding of the entity called Europe but in terms of the immigrant policies and encounters with state officials and agents for immigration related problems, there are a number of stories. Over the past decade, Europe has been seen to have stricter immigrant rules. After opening up of the labour market for immigrants in the mid twentieth century, European immigration laws have become more rigid towards the 1990s. The reasons for these changes includes the availability of labour within Europe, the suffering economy, and the limited numbers of jobs available being taken away by immigrant labor. The rise of in the number of immigrants, political refugees and asylum seekers has contributed to drastic measures in European immigration policies in recent times. There is the factor of selective migration whereby immigrants having certain kinds of skills are welcomed as opposed to those who are unskilled or less skilled. On August 1, 2000, Germany introduced the so called ‘green card’ programme allowing up to 20.000 foreign IT specialists to work in the country for a period of 5 years with the possibility of permits being extended.

The development of the European Union as a political and economic entity has important implications for the policies developed in the context of immigrants. For instance, the issuing of Schengen Visa has made it on the one hand possible for people to move across countries in the European Union except for the United Kingdom; however, it has also become possible to hold persons accountable on a common set of rules.

The fear of the immigrant as the intruder taking over the jobs colouring the social milieu is one aspect that has been studied extensively in scholarly works. A direct impact of this fear is seen to be reflected in immigrant laws. The closing of international borders, stringent visa restrictions, and increased checks on immigrants have made borders of Europe less penetrable.

Some of the laws concerning the immigrants have been infamous. For instance, the virginity test conducted in airports in UK in the past.

Academically the closing of the economy on the immigrants and the lack of trust have been viewed critically. Vociferously protesting the claim that immigrants are taking away native jobs, many social scientists point to the fact that the bulk of immigrants are doing jobs which the locals will shun

from doing like working as janitors, cleaners and as household workers. Immigrants in this regard are making a contribution to the economy. A respondent in a prominent town in Italy saw a problem with the recent immigrant laws.

Vishal Kumar, 41 years of age, a successful businessman and a prominent figure amongst Indians in a big city in Italy, had a lot to say about the European immigration policies. He felt that they are in deep trouble because of the policies which are 'hopeless'. The amount of skilled population is less although EU has expanded and taken in Romania and Poland there is no skilled population to the extent available in India and China. Kumar was of the view that, by closing its doors, EU is putting itself into a tight spot for example in US, Australia, Canada there has always been controlled immigration for skilled personnel. Europe is low on skilled professionals in IT sector. Rules are rigid; all non Europeans find it difficult to enter as the bureaucracy is old and rigid. Kumar recollects the instance of a Professor who went to America for a year and was not allowed to re-enter Italy for the full period of three years. The policies are made by politicians and are implemented faithfully by immigrant authorities and the police.

A large proportion of the Indian respondents were unaware of the immigration laws in Europe and about larger political debates. The most they knew about the immigrant situation is through their experiences like going to the town hall to renew their papers or the changes that have come in the immigrant situation due to the lack of jobs. They were not able to comment on the policies as they said they did have information about them.

Interestingly however, even with the restrictive immigrant laws of Europe, this has not led to a breakdown of movement. People from India are still migrating to different parts of Europe. What has changed are the stories of migration. In the 1980s, few people would have immigrated to Europe which meant that it was easier for new immigrants to get jobs and required documents for employment and stay. During those times, once a person got settled, there were many stories of him or her getting different members of the family and extended community to come and live with them abroad. But now there are difficulties in bringing other members to Europe as the resident's situation is not stable. Many of them have lost their jobs or are paying huge mortgages and paying off loans.

The changing situation has not curtailed the aspiration to be in Europe. The physical crossing of frontiers, striking contacts with agents, outwitting the authorities and traversing difficult paths reflected the resilience of the immigrant fighting against inconvenience.

Dalbir Singh, 59 years of age, a welder in a small town in Italy, provides a graphic description of different phases he went through in physical crossing of international borders. He left India when he was 20 years old. First he came down to Kathmandu and stayed there for one week. Then he took a

flight via Bangladesh to Yugoslavia. From Yugoslavia, he took a train to Istanbul and by foot crossed border to Iran (agent took a group). It almost took one month to be smuggled to Iran by paying the agent Rs. 10.000 for the journey. He started working in iron welding in Iran as his friends were there. Factory had given him a place to stay; he worked as a contract worker and illegally worked for a year. Then he came back to Turkey. While he was still in Iran, a friend from Italy working in a circus sent him a letter saying that there was work in Italy. When he was 21, he came to Italy without a visa. He felt that Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians are not given visas easily. After that, he had gone to Bulgaria for visa, then to east Europe. Not getting a visa in both the places, he went to Poland for visa and finally, in Warsaw, filled up form for Italian tourist visa. He came by train to north east Triesta (Slovenia), then went to circus friend in Tuscany. He worked there for 7 years in circus (mechanical, welding, driving). Salary was less (22, 23 euros per week). His wife wasn't there with him then. They cooked on their own; there were also other Indians in Orfei circus which was a family owned circus. From Tuscany, he came to Fidenza with puppet circus in 1989. Then he got a factory job through Italian friends. The Indian license converted to Italian without test. The Italian person who helped Kulwant to get his present job used to ask him for water while in the circus that's how he got acquainted to him; this person took him to his employer in Fidenza. He soon got regular papers made and circus papers were already there which helped him. Circus made his residence regular and he got Italian citizenship and passport.

In many of the narratives of the immigrant, the figure of the agent features. He is seldom a legal agent. The linkages are crucial as many of the respondents who have fought obstacles to be in Europe are not the ones who are most welcome in Europe. They are often from low or lower middle class homes, unskilled or semi skilled. The possibility of them running into informal agents and coaxers are greater. They do not have legal papers, guaranteed jobs or educational surety that would have allowed them a smoother passage to Europe. Their dependence on these informal agents arises from the fact that many of them are unaware of the stages of the journey or the documents needed for the purpose. The agent who is either someone from the same village or someone they personally know and they develop a bond of trust and sometimes even compulsively give large sums of money away to them as they do not have the knowledge and information to chart the journey on their own. There are many instances of person selling his land or borrowing money from his friends and relatives to pay the agent who usually charge huge sums of money. This agent helps in getting visa, or smuggling them into tourist buses, and helping them get across to the continent *via* sea routes.

Another issue which can be addressed when talking about Europe and its

borders is the prevalence of racism. In order to see Europe as an entity, there is also a need to understand how that entity is judged by the outsider with reference to racism. During our fieldwork, we heard about different instances of racism. What was important was that racism was contextualized against the stakes among different immigrants involved in being part of a bigger political union like the EU. For example, many of the school girls interviewed in a small town in Italy felt that their Romanian class mates were much more racist towards them than Italians. There was also rumour which we encountered while interviewing other people in the same locality about how a Romanian teenager stabbed a young Indian boy in the street. There was an acknowledgement about the hostility of the Romanian community towards immigrants.

There have been accounts of individual cases of racism. People across age, sex and gender background have seen to experience racism in different situations in their lives in Europe. Some have encountered racism in their work places, some at supermarket and some at schools. Racist comments varied from commenting on the social and cultural habits of the respondents, so Indian students have been commented upon that they stink. Racist comments are also made in the way Indians dress or look. The character of 'odour' has been mentioned by few of the respondents to talk about way in which they have been racially differentiated. Racism has been faced by Indians across class differences in some situation or another. Most of the time, such behavior is overlooked, sometimes people get offended but they still chose to ignore it, and for some it becomes part of regular social conduct.

Vishal Kumar, a successful businessman in a metropolitan city of Italy, mentions instances of subtle acts of racism which on the surface is not very prominent, but that does not mean they are completely absent. He experienced racism in airports and other places. In Germany for example, he was stopped and not his business colleague who is a tall Icelander. He joked about it by making his friend seem like his body guard trying to protect him. He could manipulate the situation as he was very confident. Another time, he was aware of racism when, in the residential locality, he bought the best apartment. He is the only immigrant in the building with other Italians, some of whom looked at him sceptically but later, when he bought a good car, their attitude changed. When status is high, the attitude of people is different. He feels that a similar attitude is also prevalent in India. More than therefore a strict sign of racism, it was the attitude of the people. He also saw a so-called link between the intelligence of the person and the respective virtue he or she sees as important. In his opinion, a highly intelligent person won't judge a person based on his material attributes, but will appreciate his worth regardless of which part of the world he or she comes from.

Respondents characteristics

Name⁴, Age, Sex, Religion, Place of birth, Place of interview, Occupation

- Dalbir Singh, 59, Male, Hindu, Rajasthan, Small town in Italy, Welder;
- Maninder Singh, 17, Male, Hindu, Rajasthan, Small town in Italy, School student;
- Pankaj, 25, Male, Hindu, Maharashtra, Big city in Italy, Professional course Student;
- Dinesh, 25, Male, Hindu, Kolkata, Big city in Delhi, Professional course Student;
- Harvinder Singh, 37, Male, Hindu, Uttar Pradesh, Small town in Italy, Unemployed;
- Vishal Kumar, 41, Male, Hindu, Big city in Italy, Businessman;
- Sweety, 21, Female, Hindu, Delhi, Big city in Italy, Professional course Student;
- Harminder Singh, 16, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Gagandeep, 16, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Singh Reema Singh, 20, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School student;
- Manpreet Kaur, 18, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Narender Sharma, 36, Male, Hindu, Punjab, Small town in Italy, Dairy farmer;
- Suman Kaur, 16, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Prabjyot, 16, Female, Jat Sikh, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Rani, 17, Female, Jat Sikh, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Prerna, 18, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, School Student;
- Dalbir Singh, 59, Male, Hindu, Small town in Italy, Welder;

⁴For ethical reasons, names have been deleted.

- Jiten Singh, 48, Male, Sikh, Punjab, Small town in Italy, Cheese factory worker;
- Laxman Chandra, 30, Male, Hindu, Uttaranchal, Metropolitan in India, Chef;
- Harvajan, 60, Male, Sikh, Metropolitan in India, Businessman;
- Singh, in India;
- Rajat, 28, Male, Hindu, Kolkata, Metropolitan in India, Marketing;
- Vikram Singh, 35, Male, Sikh, Punjab, Big city in Italy, 'Social worker';
- Rajpal, 41, Male, Hindu, Small town in Italy, Factory worker;
- Puja, 22, Female, Hindu, Delhi, Big city in Italy, Professional course Student;
- Rupinder Singh, 22, Female, Sikh, Punjab, Metropolitan in India, Management Student;
- Tanisha, 20, Female, Hindu, Delhi, Metropolitan in India, Student;
- Ranvir Singh, 26, Male, Hindu, Rajasthan, Metropolitan in India, Unemployed;
- Rahul Upadhyay, 30, Male, Hindu, Meghalaya, Metropolitan in India, Consultant;
- Manoj Khanna, 25, Male, Hindu, Delhi, Metropolitan in India, Businessman.