

Spatial Segregation, Discrimination, and Allied Dynamics in Internal and International Migrations¹

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Good afternoon to you all.

I am indeed very pleased to be here to deliver the Keynote Address at the 43rd National Conference of the Kerala Sociological Society. I thank the organisers for bestowing this honour on me. And I thank you all for being present here today.

Introduction

Migration can happen in different ways, and for different reasons. Quite often, it is individuals who move from one place to another. In other cases, a family, a kindred, or even a larger group too can relocate itself. Mostly, economic motive is the reason in migrations, but not necessarily always. People move because of natural or human-made disturbances and disasters too. The latter set of migrations normally occur within the boundaries of a country and the people thus relocated are designated *Internally Displaced Persons* (IDPs), and are often referred to as refugees. However, they do not come under the legal definition of the term *refugees*. Besides, India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Geneva). Hence the term *refugees* is valid for use, within limits, in the Indian context, in its sociological connotation alone, but not from the standpoint of international law³.

In general, the oft-repeated, and what has by now become a cliché, push and pull factors, are invoked in migration discourses. But of late, scholars of migration studies are cautious in the use of these terms. However, whether we subscribe to these terms or not, we do have to accede to the fact that when migrations occur, spatial transformation does come about; at times at both ends of the spectrum. While it is possible that some sort of spatial transformation may happen in places from where individuals or groups move to another place, the adjustments that a migrant must make in the place relocated to is more crucial. Besides social and economic fac-

tors, historical and political conditions in terms of the policies, or the lack of them, in states to which migrations happen, do dictate how and where migrants could, and indeed do, pitch their tents, or are allowed to do so by the host society⁴. What kind of space is constructed in the relocated area has a lot to do with the kind of life that is led there and the kind of implications that the space has as regards socio-economic and health security of the migrants. Time and again it has been observed that the spaces that are available to migrants are usually the geographical peripheries and social fringes, or inner-city areas, or what is, in a given context, the least desirable space of a town or city. Such places often are degraded and hazardous, and are receptacles of urban decay and waste or toxic material, and happen to be highly polluted places. Such a state of affairs has come about both in internal and international migration contexts. One is led to believe, and is convinced, that a sort of *environmental racism* too exists, besides other kinds of discriminations and deprivations vis-à-vis migrants in most places.

Also, over a period, and depending on the production and reproduction of migrant communities, ideas, structures and many more trappings from home are created and recreated in many migrant contexts, including religious observances and structures for such practices. How do these actions further transform spaces and influence local communities? And how does the host society react? To what an extent do local communities accommodate such changes? How do spatial transformations manifest themselves in different geographical locales given the local conditions in those settings? The above alluded to issues are the focus of my keynote address today.

Migrations and Segregation

One is basically concerned here and is dealing with migrants who are principally in the pursuit of better economic gains. Inherent in migration, that is, spatial mobility, invariably is the desire for social enhancement through economic upward mobility. So, when we talk of spatial transformation, we are also directly or indirectly alluding to socio-economic transformation. Invariably, migrants are at a lower-class position and at the receiving end, both literally and figuratively, compared to the already settled inhabitants among whom the migrants arrive. Lower-class position, almost invariably due to low-skills, also means being forced to locate to the fringes, both physically and socially. Peripheral positioning is something that goes hand-in-glove with lower-class existence of the migrants. As a consequence, ghettoization comes about as an inevitable outcome for the migrants. Such segregation happens both in the national and international contexts for the migrants. A look at the slums in most cities shows the preponderant presence of migrants compared to the local populace. In the Dharavi slum in

Mumbai, for instance, the Muslim population is over 30%! The percentage of Muslims in India is around 13. What makes Dharavi harbour Muslim population in such huge proportion compared to the national percentage is due to networking and utilisation of contacts by those coming from outside and finding a refuge in numbers in the given locale. Also, in Dharavi, clear regional demarcation occurs whereby those coming from the different regions of India form their own exclusive enclaves, and the newer arrivals join those from their own ethnic backgrounds in terms of region, religion, caste, language, etc. Further, among the South Indian migrants, for example, it is possible to see reserves that are inhabited by the Tamilians, Malayalis, Kannadigas and Telugus, at times showing quite distinct boundaries.

Overseas Migrations

Ghettoisation occurs in the context of international migrations too. In general, migrants⁵ move into congested inner-city areas where cheap accommodation is available. When such an occurrence comes about, the earlier settlers, who mostly happen to be from a class position higher than the migrants, move out of the inner-city areas to the suburbs. In western cities where such incidences have come about, the process is referred to as the *white flight* since the black or coloured late-comers are not welcome and the whites do not like cohabiting with the blacks or the coloureds. In many British and American cities this phenomenon has occurred with a high degree of regularity. French cities seem to be different in this respect. The original settlers, the locals, that is, the whites, still predominantly occupy the inner-city core areas. It is the migrants who are scattered and inhabit the suburbs. The city of Paris is a good example as to how the core inner-city areas are still overwhelmingly populated by the whites. This phenomenon, that is, an occurrence of a kind wherein the natives inhabit the inner-city areas, is come across in other European cities too. The English and US cities are different; the native whites do leave the inner-cities and move on to the suburbs. This is not only spatial segregation from the point of view of the immigrants but also for the natives. Whether the natives relocate as in the latter cases of the English and US cities or do not do so as in the former cases of other European cities, spatial transformation indeed ensues. Besides the spaces getting redefined and restructured in the geographical contexts, other factors of the transformative kind happen and these are in the realms of history, socio-economic aspects, and race; all these impinge on spatial segregation.

In Europe and the USA, race played, and has been playing, a huge role in spatial segregation but there did not exist, at least manifestly and in an overt pertinent manner, official sanction for physical segregation and exclusion, at least not after the late-1960s. But South Africa and Zimbabwe

(formerly Rhodesia) made no compunctions concerning racial discrimination, and indulged in physical segregation between the whites and the coloureds and blacks, and oppressed the non-whites economically and politically. The policy of apartheid was officially sanctioned and the state was wholly complicit in racial discrimination and physical segregation in South Africa and Zimbabwe till about the mid-1990s. Remnants and dregs of the apartheid policy still impact the blacks and coloureds in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

In the Gulf too, which has seen the immigration of droves of Indians, particularly of the labour class, there is discrimination of the physical kind and geographical segregation, but this is not necessarily of the racial kind. It is more in the realm of class discrimination wherein the poorer sections and lowest of classes cannot afford housing and living establishments in the richer quarters of the cities in the Gulf. While in other contexts, for instance in Europe and the US, the lower classes do have the opportunities to move up the economic and social ladder over a period of time, even obtain citizenship, and join the political mainstream, such an opportunity is impossible, at least as things stand, in the Gulf context. So, what starts off as ghettoization in the Gulf context continues to be so despite years of stay for those immigrants who live there, renewing their work and stay permits every now and then. Segregation and exclusion are the order of life in the Gulf for the immigrants. In certain cities of the Gulf, particularly in the Emirates, some of the Emiratis, a la the white flight in the west, have left their earlier habitats to avoid rubbing shoulders with the immigrants, particularly of the labour kind.

Also, to be considered here is the factor of upward mobility. In the UK, USA and France, and some other countries too, those migrants who joined the echelons of the working and labour class have had opportunities to climb up the educational, economic, and as a concomitant phenomenon, the social ladder, and have been upward mobile economically and socially, have got out of the ghettos and inner-city areas (suburbs in the case of France), and have moved to better housing and to relatively more desirable locales, over time. In the Gulf such opportunities will never come the way of the migrants. It is not exactly an apartheid kind of situation but not completely dissimilar, as it is not race that is a factor, at least not in a manifest manner, though subtle racial discrimination cannot be ruled out totally, but it is class phenomenon to a large extent that operates in the context of the Gulf⁶.

Demography and Reproduction

Some of the second-, and in some cases the third-generation immigrants do not eke out the kind of life that their fathers and grandfathers did in the

case of UK, USA and France. Also, in these countries reproduction and demographic transition came about among the immigrants when their women joined them and children were born locally, that is, in the migrated-to country context. In the Gulf such possibility does not exist as the women of the labour class cannot join their men folk. It is single male migration that has been on for almost over four decades. Women wait back home for their sons, brothers, and husbands to make annual visits and add to the family's coffers.

Kings, Maharajas, Nawabs and Nizams, dictators, and totalitarian regimes controlled (still do in some settings) the lives of the proletariats with a vice-like grip and had sway in oppressing, manipulating, and exploiting the lives of the latter in all sorts of manner. Apartheid regimes are not much different; in fact, they have been worse given the circumstances under which the discriminated against blacks and coloureds were made to live. That is, they were barely allowed to live a human kind of life and their existence was completely at the mercy of their white masters in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Exclusion and segregation in contemporary migrations, in some contexts, are not much different from things of yore, particularly in the Gulf for the low-skilled and lower-waged.

Spaces get transformed in various ways and one such transformation happens when the numbers of the migrants keep growing either through immigration or through local reproduction. At some given potent point, which may vary from context to context, the migrants decide to break away from an earlier larger group that had not enabled them to project their particular group ethnic identity. This happens because they get subsumed in the larger group, for instance an identity like Indian. Also, they may have established some structures from home like a temple, or a gurdwara or a mosque for joint use of all the migrants in common. When they reach, what I would like to call, a **Critical Demographic Scale** (CDS), they start emphasising their own exclusive group identity, like say that of Tamil or Malayali or Punjabi, and may, and often do, bring in structures from home and replicate in the migrant situation what is specific to their own ethnic group and identity. So, erstwhile local spaces are transformed when not just ideas but also edifices are constructed in places where they have migrated to. At times these structures brought from home may be quite old and in some cases, may be even archaic and almost given up or forgotten in their home country context altogether. Among some migrants, particularly the older ones, one comes across ideas and practices that appear to have frozen in time when compared to what has transpired and changed in their own home country contexts. To reiterate, CDS is reached due to family reunions, women joining their men folk, children being born locally; in a nutshell there is demographic transformation. Also, CDS is possible today

among many migrants due to relatively easier and frequent travel facilities to the homelands and contacts there, and those from the homelands joining them as immigrants. This did not happen in the case of the older migrants, those who went as indentured labour to work on plantations and the like in the Caribbean, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Suriname, Reunion Islands, etc. Most of them lost touch and could not maintain any contact with their homeland. Though they carried some ideas and structures from home, these froze over a period of time, as the dynamism to drive for change was not forthcoming.

In the case of the newer migrants, particularly those who went to the US during the 1960s and later, and who went for higher education after already having had education in top Indian institutions like the Indian Institute of Science, IITs, IIMs, and came from at least upper middleclass backgrounds, maintaining contacts with home was not difficult because most of them landed lucrative jobs after their studies, obtained green cards, and stayed back in the US. Some relinquished their Indian citizenship too. For them travel back and forth vis-à-vis the homeland was possible and they formed a different kind of settlement pattern, and no clustered and cloistered settlement leading to ghettoization occurred in their case. These migrants were a different breed altogether compared to the older migrants. There were no pressures on them to form the kind of spaces that their lower-class country-cousins (in the Gulf, and earlier in the indenture context) had to do out of sheer necessity, and dictated by lower class existence. What is also imperative to emphasise here is that the host society did not have any compulsions and restrictions in excluding them and segregating them as is obtained in certain situations, like the one in the Gulf for instance, or as it happened in the erstwhile apartheid regimes of South Africa or Zimbabwe. (Or as it happens in many cases for migrants within India, where for instance, local outfits like the Shiv Sena decides who can stay where, or live where, in Mumbai or other places in Maharashtra).

Influence of Events at Home and elsewhere

Going by what we have seen above, it should not be surprising at all that events that occur at home influence the migrants in their relocated places. To take up the example of England for instance, it was men from different communities and caste groups/religions from the subcontinent who had migrated to different places in England during the 1940s and lived together in the same localities, at times in one and the same building as lodgers and went to the extent of even sharing beds, in a relay sort of way, as they worked three shifts in the ammunition and textile factories. The partition of India and creation of Pakistan in 1947 gradually brought in a schism and an altered settlement pattern as Indians and Pakistanis moved away from each

other in places like Bradford, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Leicestershire, etc. People from the eastern and western wings of Pakistan did show some camaraderie in a forced sort of way as there was hardly anything in common between them. The breakaway of the eastern wing and emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, led to a further divide and Pakistanis and the nascent Bangladeshis moved away from each other with each of the sections emphasising different identities which nevertheless existed earlier too but were subsumed under the Pakistani identity. So, migrants from the subcontinent who had a solitary Indian identity got divided into three distinct ones because of India's independence, the creation of Pakistan, and the genesis and advent of Bangladesh.

Also, it is interesting to note how Indians overseas respond and react to religious as well as political happenings in their homeland. No need to go into the details as by now it is well known as to how Indians overseas responded to the BJP's religious agenda, which was evolving in relation to the Babri Masjid. There was whole-hearted support from some right-of-the-centre and extreme-right Hindu organisations, particularly in the US, for the demolition prior to the actual event. Besides, the reaction of those sections to the actual demolition was nothing short of abominable. And these sections did contribute their might and wealth in various ways towards their desire of putting up a temple at the site of the demolition. Indians overseas have reacted and responded to the BJP's electoral successes in different ways, first in 1996 and then again more recently in 2014.

Events in East Africa, during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Uganda, forced people of Indian origin there to migrate to England. They have been designated Twice Migrants. Interestingly, some of them migrated from England to the USA and Canada and earned the appellation Thrice Migrants. The events in the subcontinent and later in East Africa have had tremendous impact on not just the migrants alone, but on the policies of the UK vis-à-vis the migrants. Besides, the white natives too have reacted in different ways to these happenings in their midst. Racism too has played its part here in myriad ways.

Frequent travel back and forth and continuing and constant touch with the homeland does transform spaces in the home country too. A good example to look at is Kerala. Since the mid-1970s, gradual but sure changes have occurred all over Kerala due to the Gulf-goers making trips back home. Given the fact that low-skilled and low-waged workers could not take their families with them to the Gulf, could not stay on there permanently, had no chance whatsoever of obtaining citizenship, necessarily had to remit their savings back home. Over the years the spaces in Kerala have got transformed not just architecturally but in myriad other ways. Also, the socio-economic aspects, cultural practices, and overall consum-

er behaviour in Kerala have changed drastically since the Gulf-migration phenomenon took roots during the 1970s. And what is obtained here are dynamic practices; these changes will continue in unimagined and unforeseen ways. No other state in India, arguably, has been subjected to the kind of transformation that has come about in Kerala as a result of Gulf migration.

Conclusion

If we take stock of migrations and Indians overseas, we find various kinds of clusters of them in different countries. The varied country contexts are quite dissimilar with each other. If we talk about Indians overseas in one breath and collapse them all in a single band, we will be indulging in a seriously flawed academic exercise. Hence to talk about an Indian *diaspora* in the singular, as quite a few scholars do, will be to ignore not just the various country contexts where they are found but also the diversity that exists among them. Mainstreaming such a plural and complex grouping would be at our own peril and is something that must be avoided at all costs.

Going by the time period at which Indians migrated overseas, and the places they migrated to, we can classify them into older and indenture migrants during the 1800s and later, then those who went to the US, Canada, and England 1960s onwards, and finally, those who went to the Gulf 1970s onwards. These three groups show distinct trends in terms of how they have maintained (or not maintained) contacts with their homeland. In the case of the indentured labour there was almost zero contact with the homeland once they left the shores of India. There was no way in which, they could either get influenced by, or influence events and spaces back home. The 1960s migrants were mostly well-educated persons who went overseas for either higher education or for well-paid jobs. They could take their immediate family members with them. Also, subsequently even persons of their kindred and extended family too could join them. Besides, they could stay on in the places migrated to for long periods and could also get citizenship there. Their remittance pattern was quite different because their families were with them and they had other avenues for savings and investments. One of our former ambassadors to the US, the late Abid Husain said this about them: that overseas Indians have their hearts in India but have their money in Swiss Banks. It is the migrants who went to the Gulf who necessarily had to remit and invest back in India. And this is the section that has influenced the events and spaces back home the most. As alluded to above, the results of this continuous contact with home has had tremendous impact on the social, cultural and economic landscape of Kerala.

Notes

1. Keynote Address delivered at the 43rd National Conference of the Kerala Sociological Society. This Keynote Address is based largely on the anthropological studies conducted by the author among South Asians in England, USA, and France.
2. The author was at the Tezpur Central University in Assam, as Professor of Eminence, when he delivered this Keynote Address on 9 December 2016. Currently, he is Professor of Applied Social Sciences, C.K. Prahalad Centre for Emerging India, Loyola Institute of Business Administration, Chennai.
3. Kalam (2004)
4. Given the social and cultural notions of guest/host and hospitality that one is used to and has experienced in the South Asian and Arab contexts, it is hard to use these terms in English. But given that there are no proper English equivalents one is using these terms here with a lot of reservation. For a fuller discussion on this see Kalam (2005)
5. I consciously and deliberately do not use the term Diaspora in my work. For a detailed explanation and exposition on this see Kalam (2014 and 2002)
6. For more on the class dynamics and the policy of the Gulf states as regards migrants see Kathiravelu (2015)

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